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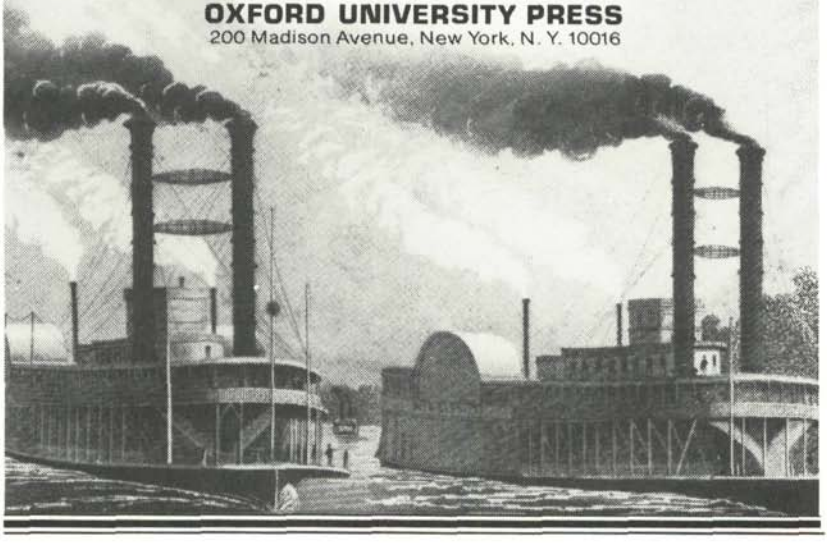

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NOTES

"Seeds of the Sixties" is adapted from a chapter of **MORRIS DICKSTEIN**'s forthcoming book *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* . . . . **MARK SHECHNER** teaches at SUNY, Buffalo. He is at work on an intellectual history of American Jews of which his article on Isaac Rosenfeld is a part . . . . **MICHAEL LALLY** lives and works in New York. He edited an anthology of new poetry called *None of the Above* recently published by Crossing Press . . . . *Where I Hang My Hat* is the title of **DICK GALLUP**'s collection of poetry, published by Harper & Row . . . . **CORTNIE LOWE** lives in Brooklyn and writes and teaches for a women's music and poetry theater group which she founded, called Women on Mars . . . . **HOWARD MOSS**'s most recent book is *A Swim Off The Rocks,* published by Atheneum. His *Selected Poems* won the National Book Award in 1972. He is poetry editor of *The New Yorker* . . . . **ALBERTO de LACERDA** teaches at Boston University . . . . Ada, Ohio is the small town where **ROBERT MULLER** studies law and writes poetry . . . . **CELIA GILBERT**'s first book of poetry, *Queen of Darkness,* will be published by Viking next June . . . . Born in Indiana in 1954, **STEVE HAMILTON** now lives and writes in New York City . . . . **ARTHUR VOGELSANG** edits *The American Poetry Review* . . . **PHILIP HASKELL** lives in East Orange, New Jersey, and Las Vegas, Nevada . . . . **MICHAEL ROSENTHAL** is the associate dean of Columbia College . . . . *There Must Be More to Love Than Death* is **CHARLES NEWMAN**'s newest book, published in September by The Swallow Press . . . **GEORGE HODOS** came to the United States in 1969. He currently works as a correspondent for two West German newspapers, while living in Los Angeles . . . . **JONATHAN BAUMBACH**'s most recent novel, *Babble,* was published this fall by the Fiction Collective. He is a co-director of the graduate creative writing program at Brooklyn College . . . . In January, Kennikat Press will publish *Excursions: Selected Literary Essays (1965-1975)* by **ROBERT BOYERS**. He is Professor of English at Skidmore and editor of *Salmagundi* magazine . . . . **GILBERT SORRENTINO**'s fifth book of poems, *White Sail,* will be published in February by Black Sparrow Press . . . . **LEONARD KRIEGEL** tells us he is working on a plan to make New York City independent of the United States. While waiting to implement his idea, he is at work on a novel and a book of non-fiction about manhood in America . . . . Currently living and writing in New York, **KATHLEEN AGENA** recently directed a writer's workshop in Chicago for the National Endowment for the Arts . . . . **LEWIS COSER**'s most recent book, *Greedy Institutions,* was published in 1974 by Free Press . . . . A teacher at Queens College, **LESLIE EPSTEIN** is the author of *P.D. Kimerakov* and *The Steinway Quintet Plus Four,* recently published by Little, Brown . . . . **WILLIAM WALLING**'s *Romantic Encounter* will be published by Yale University Press next year.

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Morris Dickstein

SEEDS OF THE SIXTIES: The Growth of Freudian Radicalism

I

One of the dominant notes of the nineteen-fifties was its moralism, which led to the displacement of concrete political issues into abstract ethical ones. With an eye on the human condition as a whole, the fifties moralist could hardly lower his olympian sights to attend to the individual lot of man-in-society. In this context Norman Mailer was a particularly significant dissenting figure. For a time he remained rooted in the residual political culture of the forties, which distinguished his fiction but also proved to be something of a dead weight. Gradually, like the rest of America, he shifted from a Marxian to a Freudian terrain. Like other fifties radicals he was most effective, and most prophetic, in the psychosexual sphere rather than in the old political one. He became adept at invoking the official values of the fifties against the lived reality. In essays like "The White Negro" he took the moralism of the fifties seriously but inverted its content. He took the individualism of the fifties seriously too, but without its stoical overtones. Where repression was, let liberation be: this was the message not only of Mailer but of a whole new line of Freudian (or Reichian) radicalism, which did so much to undermine the intellectual consensus of the cold war period.

"These have been the years of conformity and depression," Mailer wrote in 1957 in "The White Negro." "A stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collec-

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tive failure of nerve." The men of the fifties prided themselves on a moral depth beyond the duplicities of politics, yet their period will surely be known for its ultimate moral cowardice, as a time when, in Mailer's words, "one could hardly maintain the courage to be individual, to speak with one's own voice." Yet only after three groping, questing, fascinating novels did the young writer manage to break through into *his* own voice.

Mailer's emphasis on courage does not primarily refer to the courage to oppose what we now think of as the most specific vices of the fifties: witch hunts, blacklists, and union purges, the cold war and the jailing of supposed Communists. Beleaguered liberals were caught between fighting these abuses and joining them to prove their own purity. Mailer asserts that the collective opposition has failed, that "the only courage, with rare exceptions, that we have been witness to, has been the isolated courage of isolated people." Mailer himself, a celebrated young author, had made his debut in politics campaigning for Henry Wallace and the Progressive party in 1948. In a sense, all three of his early books were political novels. But he insists that by 1957 "the years in which one could complacently accept oneself as part of an elite by being a radical were forever gone."

Instead the courage that Mailer honors—his totem is Hemingway—is the courage to be, the strength to face up to death and violence, including the death and violence in oneself. The Mailer of "The White Negro" is nothing if not a man of his time. For him too the political nostrums have failed, the only salvation is individual and religious. Every age has a tendency (as Hegel and Plato demonstrated) to cultivate its own principle of decay, to foster the spirit that will eventually overthrow it. The hipster figure who stalks through Mailer's manifesto is a typical product of the existentialist brooding of the fifties. The hipster cuts through and exploits the hypocrisy of the period, the rampant cynicism about honor and social role-playing that lies just beneath the surface of its official pieties. The Organization Man of the fifties, like the con-man intellectual living off the foundations, knows that the old dreams and ideals are finished, that it's all a game, just as Mailer's hipster knows from Hemingway that "in a bad world there is no love nor mercy nor charity nor justice unless a man can keep his courage . . . that what made him feel good became therefore The Good."

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In "The White Negro" Mailer calls on the myths and values of the fifties only to undermine them. Where the fifties had substituted the isolated man, the competitive capitalist monad, for the radical dream of collective man in a just community, Mailer brandished the figure of a Nietzschean adventurer seeking experience beyond good and evil. Where the fifties had substituted religion for Marxism, Mailer discovered "the American existentialist" who transcended the sham of suburban religiosity and churchgoing. Where the fifties theorized about totalitarianism in far-off places, Mailer found a creeping totalitarianism here at home, "a slow death by conformity," he said, "with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled." Mailer's psychopathic hero is a bomb that explodes beneath the bland surface of the fifties, constructed out of all its repressed violence and rebelliousness, composed of the longings for personal autonomy and extreme experience that could not be satisfied by respectability, domesticity, maturity, and competitive success. The fifties also believed in love, if its popular plays, songs and books are to be credited, and here too Mailer expropriates the period's values for his own purpose.

> At bottom, the drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it. . . . But in this search, the psychopath becomes an embodiment of the extreme contradictions of the society which formed his character . . .

At bottom Mailer's purpose is to explore those contradictions—and the contradictions in himself—not to recommend violence. The key works of the new sensibility are all disguised or overt critiques of the fifties, written during that time, but suffused with a sense of isolation unparalleled in our cultural life since the first stirrings of modernism.

The appearance of works like "The White Negro" in the late fifties makes it more difficult for us to treat that period as a single entity. In fact of course the sensibility of any period is plural; its strands are diverse and contradictory. What we in hindsight call change is usually the unexpected swelling of a minor current as it imperceptibly becomes a major one, and alters the prevailing mood. We can now see that such a change was occurring in the late fifties, and it was prophetic of Mailer and Paul Goodman (in *Growing Up*

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Absurd) to seize on the beat and hip phenomena, as well as the plague of delinquency and youthful anomie, as cracks in the whole system, harbingers of a new spirit they themselves only dimly anticipated. Though dissent during the period remained strictly theoretical, the late fifties saw the publication of a number of books, creative as well as analytical, that were deeply hostile to the dominant spirit of the age. A number of them became canonical works of the sixties, much to the surprise of their authors, who often failed to write nearly as well once the winds had shifted in their direction. Whatever this reveals about the uses of alienation in the life of the mind, it remains fascinatingly true that the cultural revolution of the sixties was one of the startling instances of the precedence of theory over practice. The immediate intellectual underpinnings of the sixties are there in the dissident works of the late fifties. It is this ferment of criticism and theory and its connection to later developments that I wish to explore here.

II

Freud had insisted that all civilization was built on repression, but American society in the forties and fifties was clearly more repressive than the common good required. Freud had made a similar point about the late Victorians, but, as Herbert Marcuse was fond of pointing out, advanced industrial society had perfected methods of manipulation and control—what Marcuse called "surplus-repression"—undreamt of by our strait-laced grandparents. Marcuse's favorite example was the mass media, especially the electronic media, which had been honed by the Nazis into a unique instrument of propaganda and totalitarian domination, and which (according to Marcuse) served as a subtle weapon of conformity even in the democratic countries, making a hollow shell of our formal liberties and representative institutions.

Without accepting this analysis we can acknowledge that America in the early fifties was something less than an open society. The dominion of puritanism in the arts and in domestic and social relationships existed side by side with widespread intimidation in public life, in business, and in the professions. Men who had spent

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thirty years as movie directors, union officials, or university professors disappeared from their professions without a trace, became unpersons, a solemn warning to others; those in less exalted positions were undone even more anonymously. The pressure of this environment on the intellectual life can be observed in Marcuse's best book, *Eros and Civilization* (1955), an attempted synthesis of Marx and Freud in which the magic word "Marx" is never mentioned. It's hard to tell how much this self-censorship is due to the paranoia of the refugee, how much to prudent calculation, and how much to Marcuse's own desire to reach an audience inoculated against radicalism.

It's worth asking ourselves why the Freudian radicalism in Marcuse's book, and in the work of Paul Goodman and Norman O. Brown, came to fruition at the time it did, in a period so unsympathetic to radicalism of any kind, and why it had such a dramatic influence on the intellectual life of the sixties. After all, the most striking quality of the cultural life of the sixties, the combination of political militancy and cultural bohemianism, the thirties and the twenties, was precisely in line with those earlier theoretical conjunctions of Marx and Freud. This is not to say that Marcuse was responsible for the counterculture, any more than C. Wright Mills created the New Left or Goodman fomented the campus uprisings. (Goodman would later be amused and dismayed by young people who spouted his ideas but seemed never to have read a book, spouted them *at him*.) What happened was more than intellectual fashion or Mephistophelean influence. Our society changed for its own deep-seated reasons; society responded in its massive and lumbering way to the same grievous conditions that had first provoked certain intellectuals into critical protest and utopian speculation. As Auden said of Yeats, "Mad Ireland hurt him into poetry."

It's safe to say that few kids became radicals, hippies, or freaks in the sixties from reading *Eros and Civilization* or *Growing Up Absurd.* Similarly, the rioters of Watts, Detroit and Newark had not learned their discontent from LeRoi Jones, Stokely Carmichael, or even Martin Luther King. Like the children of the white middle class, they were acting out the logic of their own lives, though it sometimes took the language of ideology to convince them that their discontent mattered. The tremors of the sixties, which shook institutions in so many remote corners of society, were generated from society's own deep core, from

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all those problems neglected in the fifties that could no longer be wished away—the same problems that men like Mills, Goodman, and Marcuse—to say nothing of sociological popularizers like Vance Packard and William Whyte—had already gone far towards identifying.

What complicated this parallel between thought and practice was that so many of the disaffected in the sixties were the products of affluence and education rather than deprivation. Their predecessors, the younger generation in the fifties, had played hard to win, but *they* were challenging the rules of the game or refusing to play at all. The intelligentsia of the fifties, centered in a few cities and a few universities, were a self-conscious elite disdainful of mass society and middlebrow vulgarity. But the "young intelligentsia" whom C. Wright Mills had identified as agents of change were to become an amorphous mass spread out through thousands of colleges and communes, in the country and the city, whose culture enshrined music and films and drugs more than books, but who adopted certain books that rationalized their discontent and gave it a structure, books that helped them articulate a new set of values. Some of these writers in turn adopted them, visibly surprised that their own ideas, deemed unpublishable in the fifties, should suddenly find a mass echo.

I wish to single out Marcuse, Goodman and Brown as the theorists whose work had the greatest impact on the new culture of the sixties. Their work responded deeply to the social and moral impasse of the Eisenhower era but also went beyond criticism to a new vision of the social order and its possibilities. The impasse of an era is reflected in the impasse of its criticism. The ills of American society in the fifties were rivaled by the decadence of Marxist criticism, which had degenerated into a metaphysic of brittle slogans and rigid historical hopes, none of which could hide two generations of moral and political compromise. For Old Leftists society was an engine with certain parts, going in a predictable direction. For ex-Leftists, now under the sway of Burke, Tocqueville, or Weber, society was a delicate organism whose parts could not be tampered with without grave risk of damaging the whole. Both points of view were peculiarly fatalistic, and unresponsive to what actually could be done in society. The Marxism of the former was "economic" and "scientific"; it sought "iron laws" in history and—unlike the Marxism of Marx—left

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little room for the agency of the individual or for his claims to happiness in the here-and-now. On the other hand the anti-Marxism of the latter group put all its emphasis on the individual, but saw his fate as gloomy and tragic, impervious to change, hedged by necessity. (In both cases social thought shades off into a branch of religion.)

What provided a way out of this impasse of social thought was a peculiar blend of Marxian and Freudian revisionism, which can best be observed in its distinct forms in the seminal works of Marcuse, Brown, and Goodman. The end of the fifties saw the first publication in English of Marx's early writings, which emphasized "alienation" rather than the laws of political economy, and which gave much impetus to the development of a new humanism that would steal Marx away from his orthodox keepers. Similarly, the Freud who emerged at the same time was not the Freud of the fifties whose dark view of human nature and the necessity of restraint provided the underpinning for a new social quietism, a new version of original sin. Nor was it the liberal revisionism which, in departing from Freud's instinctual theories, tended to de-emphasize sex and to find happiness in the successful "adjustment" to society's demands.

The new Freudian radicalism stressed the repressive character of society, but without the later Freud's tragic and stoical belief that these repressions could never be transcended, that the "realm of necessity" could never give way to the "realm of freedom." For Marcuse the key change since Freud's death is the tremendous expansion of technology which, despite the threat it poses of greater manipulation and control, also points toward greater freedom—to be achieved through the diminution of human labor, creating the possibility of a society built more on leisure and pleasure. What is paradoxical here is that Marcuse, though criticizing the structure and priorities of the advanced industrial society of the fifties, largely accepts its technological optimism, its faith in an ever-increasing economy of affluence and abundance. Indeed, he even scales new heights:

> Automation, once it became *the* process of material production, would revolutionize the whole society. The reification of human labor power, driven to perfection, would shatter the reified form by cutting the chain that ties the individual to the machinery—the mechanism through which his own labor en-

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> slaves him. Complete automation in the realm of necessity would open the dimension of free time as the one in which man's private *and* societal existence would constitute itself. This would be the historical transcendence toward a new civilization.

Much could be said about this passage as an illustration of the strengths and limits of Marcusean dialectics. The style of argument, familiar from orthodox Marxism—Marcuse is actually building upon a passage in Marx's *Grundrisse*—suggests that though things seem to get worse they're actually getting better, for they're moving toward a dialectical reversal that will shatter the whole game. Elsewhere in the same book Marcuse insists that though things seem to be getting better (more freedom and leisure, higher standards of living) they're actually getting worse, through what he calls "repressive desublimation," in other words, the distraction of bread and circuses to keep the masses content and in their place.

Both these arguments imply that common sense is a trap, that the surface of things is very different from the reality, that society is never quite what it seems. This tack enables Marcuse to expose the genuinely paradoxical character of some recent social trends and "democratic" institutions. It enables him to develop a notion of freedom in some ways deeper than the liberal one, which Matthew Arnold described as "doing as one likes." It enables him to think in a utopian way, to conceive of transcending the social given. But it also leads him into a lofty German contempt for empirical reality, including the expressed needs and wishes of most individuals. "In the last analysis," Marcuse says, "the question of what are true and false needs must be answered by the individuals themselves, *but only in the last analysis;* that is, if and when they are free to give their own answer" (my italics). Since by his definition they are not free, he feels obliged to tell them what their real needs are. Moreover, we imagine that they could only be considered free when their wishes come to accord with his analysis.

> As long as they are kept incapable of being autonomous, as long as they are indoctrinated and manipulated (down to their very instincts), their answer to this question cannot be taken as their own.

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Marcuse explicitly rejects totalitarian dictation, but often he writes more in the spirit of a conservative elitist than a democratic radical. Though Marcuse will not force men to be free, he has little respect for the way they live, work, and play.

The same can be said of many of Marcuse's former colleagues in the Frankfurt school, out of which his work emerged in the twenties and thirties. As brilliant theorists who evolved a humanistic, Hegelian Marxism and applied it to many areas of contemporary life their work was of inestimable value. They fashioned a profound synthesis between dialectical materialism and the Western cultural tradition that Nazism had overshadowed and Stalinism had ruptured. But their writings on popular culture—T.W. Adorno on jazz, for example—reveal the extent to which their critical perspective belongs not to Marxism, but to the long and honorable line of conservative attacks on modernity. By attacking the "culture industry" they affirmed an allegiance to high culture and the autonomy of art which Stalinism had betrayed. But they also left little room for new perspectives on either mass culture or the avant-garde, of the sort we find in more democratic theorists like Brecht or Walter Benjamin.

The style of these men expresses the same elite viewpoint. The nimble and elegant ping-pong of Adorno's dialectics affirms its author's contempt for the common sense of empiricism and the bureaucratic sloganeering of the Stalinists, and announces his adherence to the German philosophical tradition; but the language is opaque to all but the most subtle and highly trained reader. Marcuse's cruder and more accessible style is equally insulting to the empirical mind. The conceptual "transcendence" that he gains by his play of abstractions fails to compensate for the loss of concreteness, the lack of observed reality. Words like *liberation, domination, transcendence,* and *reification* sometimes take on a mechanical trajectory of their own in his prose, become reified, as it were, into opaque verbal blocks that relate only to each other, not to the world. Robert Frost compared free verse to playing tennis with the net down; at his worst Marcuse plays philosophy with the world down, and triumphs in a hollow kingdom of words. Even his major work of social criticism, *One-Dimensional Man,* shows what difficulty he has keeping his eye trained for long on society. The famous analysis is nearly all in the first two chapters, after which he turns in relief from society to ideol-

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ogy, where a purely philosophical critique will get by. Even *Eros and Civilization*, a much greater book, disintegrates into a paraphrase of Schiller and other poets and philosophers when it comes to deliver its own message, to tell us how a new life can be lived.

This sort of abstraction and distance from society is traditional in German *Kulturkritik* and metaphysics, the very mode of philosophizing Marx sought to overthrow. In Marcuse's case it was surely compounded by a felt distance from "the American way of life," including the university scene. Both *One-Dimensional Man* and *Eros and Civilization* are full of comments that tacitly apply with special force to the alienating circumstances of the fifties. He sees the age as one in which "the social controls have been introjected to the point where even individual protest is affected at its roots. The intellectual and emotional refusal 'to go along' appears neurotic and impotent." An even more personal comment, especially if we recall Marcuse's controversial academic career, occurs later in *One-Dimensional Man,* in the course of his lively and ingenious assault on Anglo-Saxon "ordinary language" philosophy, whose methods he compares to those of the congressional committees:

> The intellectual is called on the carpet. What do you mean when you say . . . ? Don't you conceal something? You talk a language which is suspect. You don't talk like the rest of us, like the man in the street, but rather like a foreigner who does not belong here.

There is a strain of hedonism in Marcuse which must have found America's Puritan work ethic particularly jarring. For Marcuse all labor is alienated labor; satisfaction comes only through erotic activity, leisure, or play. Nothing in Marcuse is so distinctly unmarxian as this refusal to envision the possibility of satisfaction through work, through unalienated labor. It takes us back instead to the utopian speculations of the early Marx, as in the famous attack on the division of labor in *The German Ideology*, in which he sees communism as a society "which makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."

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III

By comparison with Marcuse, Paul Goodman was a man who seemed at home in America, a Jeffersonian rather than a Hegelian, and one who especially emphasized the value of satisfying work—though he himself lived a variegated life that fit Marx's description rather neatly. Like Marcuse he was also something of a conservative; he identified Coleridge and Arnold among his philosophical forebears (in other words, the same tradition of Tory radicalism that had influenced Trilling in America and Leavis, Hoggart, and Williams in England). I find, however, that it's extremely difficult to talk of him in these impersonal terms, though I knew him only from a distance. Like Allen Ginsberg, Goodman was more than a writer in the sixties; he was a pervasive and inescapable *presence*. During the sixties, both poetry and theory made a pact with the devil and descended into the street, following Marx's admonition to change the world, not merely to interpret it. Goodman was a fixture at all these public rituals—the protest-meetings and teach-ins, the marches and demonstrations—but not because he was a great orator or politician. My own impression on the few occasions I saw him in action was that he was above all a great teacher, the most tireless and incandescent Socratic figure of the age. This came out not only in his passion for the young, which was fueled by his sexual need, but also in the relish with which he took on alien audiences that were by no means ready to cheer his gospel. As if haunted by unhappiness that made private life unbearable, he never seemed able to say no to any public occasion. At the end of *New Reformation*, his moving and bittersweet retrospective on the sixties, written when he was already very tired, he asked himself:

> "Why do I go? Ah, why do I go? It's not for the money and it's not out of vanity. I go because they ask me. Since I used to gripe bitterly when I was left out of the world, how can I gracelessly decline when I am invited in?"

The occasion in question was a seminar at Dartmouth for "American Telephone and Telegraph executives who were being groomed to be vice-presidents." Most Leftists, old or new, had they deigned to go at all, might have seized the occasion to denounce them as exploiters,

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fascists, and robber barons. Instead, Goodman's contribution was a list of practical suggestions, some so practical as to be radical and unadoptable, but no doubt sufficient to provoke hours of heated talk.

Goodman behaved the same way with audiences that were prepared to idolize him. The teamsman's pep-talk was alien to him. He was incapable of flattery, though he could be gratuitously brutal. He tended to hector his audiences, to galvanize them within their immediate situation. He always spoke *to* them, not out of some private dazzling soliloquy of his own. The first time I saw this happen was at Columbia in 1960 or 1961, when some of us connected with the undergraduate paper tried to organize a series of speakers. We had no money to offer; everyone was busy, busy—all our culture heroes turned us down. All but Paul Goodman, of course. The talk he gave seemed based on no more than impromptu jottings scribbled on the subway, but it was about us, about where we were, especially about Columbia and the poor citizenship, the civic irresponsibility it had always displayed toward its immediate community and toward his beloved city. In short, Goodman gave a complete analysis of the Columbia student uprising—seven years before it occurred! It wasn't carping, it wasn't rhetorical, it wasn't even eloquent; it was simply practical, but also utopian, since it was based on a grand vision of the role a university could play in a great urban scene, and on his sadness and anger that it did not choose to play that role.

A few years later I watched him do the same thing for three days nonstop at a conference of graduate students somewhere in western Massachusetts. Even when he was not lecturing officially he was surrounded by people, and he gave himself to them completely; as a continuous Socratic performance it was so impressive it was scary. I myself was disappointed that I couldn't get him more interested in some of the clever and brilliant things I was saying. My bright-young-man's ego was bruised. I wasn't used to it. Later when he published his journal *Five Years*, to show the world that he was not a good man but one driven and debased by sexual hungers and humiliations, I was able to guess at what had happened: I simply hadn't turned him on. Sex and pedagogy were intertwined for Goodman, along with citizenship, abstract ideas, family and religious feelings, and so on, as they were for the Greeks. He could turn people on when he too was turned on; he needed to take as well as give.

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Far from being a weakness in his work, this vulnerability and naked need gives his work an emotional charge missing from most social criticism; it binds together his stories and poems with his essays and critical writings into one unfolding personal statement. Whatever their differences of texture and form, they all remain the testimony of one spirited citizen and man of letters. At the end of *New Reformation* he was glad to find himself "thinking from where I breathe." To this reader he always seems to be thinking from where he lives. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), his masterwork in social criticism and a book that did much to inform the whole frame of mind of thinking people in the sixties.

The immediate subject of *Growing Up Absurd* is the young, mainly those who have dropped out into the Beat subculture and the others whose delinquency has dropped them into the hands of the law. Its real subject is the American of the Eisenhower age, a society which in Goodman's view gave its youth no world to grow up in. The world seems "absurd," meaningless; it fails to provide satisfying roles and models. Hence the young do not simply drop out; rather, "they act out a critique of the organized system that everybody in some sense agrees with." Goodman is here applying existential and psychological concepts that are usually excluded from social analysis. He aims to produce an account of youth and of society that is impermissibly inward, novelistic, even subjective. Since his concern, like that of the nineteenth-century English culture critics, is more with the *quality* of life than with material well-being, he needs above all to convey the *feel* of contemporary experience both for himself and for his youthful subjects.

In retrospect we can see how much Goodman's personal situation contributed to this bold and moving analysis. His passionate feeling for these young male outcasts no doubt is grounded as much in his homosexuality as in his general humanity, especially since he felt he was an outcast himself, a sexual nigger. He wrote in *New Reformation*: "My homosexual acts have made me a nigger, subject to arbitrary brutality and debased when my out-going impulse is not taken for granted as a right." The condition of the outsider, the reject of the "organized system" with his "addiction to forbidden haunts and vices," runs like a thread through the whole book, not only because of the author's sexual habits but also thanks to 25 years of near

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poverty and neglect as a writer. Unlike Marcuse, Goodman was not taken in by the myths of contemporary affluence. Well before Michael Harrington's book *The Other America* he concentrated on the marginal and the unemployed, the pockets of victimization; like Harrington he had sometimes lived in them. Goodman considered himself a prime reject of the organized system of literature, which had little use for an all-purpose "man of letters" who couldn't settle down. Thus like other fifties intellectuals, like the epigoni of the Frankfurt school, Goodman attacks the promoters and hucksters of popular culture, and complains of "an organized system of reputations that is calculated statistically to minimize risk and eliminate the unsafe."

I don't mean to suggest that *Growing Up Absurd* is mainly a personal gripe, only to explore how Goodman—without being in the least "confessional" like many later sixties writers—brought his own visceral feelings to bear on the social reality. He challenged the period's sacrosanct myth of value-free objectivity in criticism and social science, putting together a book that's part anecdote, part philosophy, part griping, part sociology, and part visionary moral statement, all set down in a deceptive manner of ungainly informality that only *seems* casual. All this helped get the book rejected by a dozen publishers, including the one who had commissioned it, before *Commentary* magazine picked it up to inaugurate its new leftish sixties regime. Today the book is still described (by friendly observers like Henry Pachter) as "loosely written" and "poorly researched," platitudes that miss the cunning and originality of its style.

Goodman's stance is a strange combination of the polymath and the plain speaker who is just your ordinary informed citizen raised to the *nth* power. It's directed against not only the false neutrality of the social scientist but also the hyper-cultivated Brahmin tone of the literary intellectuals of the fifties. For their air of ironic sophistication and world-weariness Goodman substitutes straight talk, honest indignation, little homilies and emotional outbursts, and an appeal to corny values like nobility, honor, community, patriotism and faith, each of which casts a subversive light on our current social arrangements. Like the Victorian social critics, Goodman shows how radical yet traditional it can be to hold an inhumane society to its own professed values. To him this is a society that ignores the human cost

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in its rush toward modernization and profit. Like the Victorians Goodman emphasizes the paradoxes of "progress," the loss of human scale in our physical and social environment, "the present waste of human resources," the devaluation of both work and leisure.

But Goodman is no machine breaker at war with modernity and efficiency. As a good anarchist he can easily demonstrate the inefficiency of a quack modernism mindlessly attached to bigness and waste. "There is probably a point of complexity at which, cut off from the country, the city ceases to advance beyond country backwardness; it becomes impractical and begins to induce its own kind of stupefaction and ineptness." He goes on to list ten or twelve ways the city has changed since his youth, with some practical alternatives. No Jeremiah prophesying ruin, Goodman earns his nostalgia and indignation by being concrete. His is practical optimism that values the subject over the product and puts "animal ardor" and a messy vitality above the illogical wisdom of the machine and the social conglomerate.

All this is conveyed in Goodman's style, which like Wordsworth's is artful in its moral and emotive simplicities; at its best it achieves a uniquely plebeian kind of eloquence, a populist rhetoric of "plain talk" behind which the avant-garde artist is almost effaced. Norman Mailer was one of those who were famously unimpressed by this style (at least after Goodman had attacked *him*); in *The Armies of the Night* he labels it merely pedestrian, but also admits that his antipathy to Goodman is more personal and sexual than literary. They are rival "sexologues," he explains, and he accuses Goodman of holding a hygienic, permissive view of homosexuality (and "onanism"), while he, Mailer, knows that all sex is fraught with guilt and sin, and some kinds are simply wrong, soul-destroying. It's also rather obvious in *Armies* that Mailer envies Goodman's youthful New Left legions, just as he confesses his jealousy of Robert Lowell's name, fame and literary eminence. The book is a complex bid for both political leadership *and* literary standing, and it very nearly succeeds.

Politically, too, their differences were important; during the Kennedy years, Goodman, an advocate of decentralization and "community control," attacked Mailer's Carlylean attraction to the Great Leader. But this was preceded by their sexual quarrel, which goes back to "The White Negro" and *Growing Up Absurd*—goes

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back even beyond that, to the impact of Wilhelm Reich on literary intellectuals in the 1940s. A close look at the sexual and political implications of "The White Negro" and *Growing Up Absurd* would tell us a good deal about the cultural radicalism that emerged at the end of the fifties.

IV

Earlier I noted how prophetic it was for Mailer and Goodman to draw serious attention to the new bohemian subculture of the late fifties and to the upsurge of youthful delinquency and rebelliousness. In retrospect, those things foreshadowed a great deal of the communal utopianism, urban restlessness, and street violence of the sixties, but at the time they were treated with no such seriousness. The media played up both the Beats and the juvenile hoodlums as isolated spectacles of inarticulate exhibitionism. Mailer and Goodman undertook to become spokesmen for this discontent, interpreters of all the "acting out," who could read in withdrawal and youthful anomie a complex critique of the system and its values. For some of us who were in college then, these men instantly became heroes, as did Norman O. Brown. I can recall no public event more inspiring and electrifying at that time than Brown's vatic, impassioned Phi Beta Kappa oration at Columbia in 1960 (later published under the title "Apocalypse: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind"). Because these men were intellectuals, because we were budding intellectuals, they had made a startling conjunction for us, a conjunction which they themselves embodied, between the world of ideas and a new mode of experience—a new consciousness. We recognized that none of them had been minutely faithful to his subject, that they had seized on the hipsters or on psychoanalysis as the occasion for a personal breakthrough rather than a problem of interpretation. But in doing so they had discovered not only new and transfiguring ideas but a new intellectual style: impassioned, prophetic, and rich with the promise of salvation and the dream of a new world. Unlike ordinary academics these intellectuals spoke to the ultimate issues of culture and personal destiny.

I think it's fair to say that they spoke with special urgency to

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our newness to the world of ideas—we who knew their vocabulary but had never seen it used with such animating directness—and to our late adolescence, for we knew that at bottom their gospel was a sexual one, that sex was their wedge for reorienting all human relations. And for us at that moment the sexual hunger was paramount, for all our self-conscious intellectuality. It was our breakthrough they were talking about, enacting—our worldlessness and coming-into-being, our absurd growing up. It mattered little that Mailer stressed the macho and violent side of the hipster figure while Goodman—perhaps in line with his own sexual struggle—stressed the anxiety and displacement, the lack of any experience that felt real. To us they were two sides of the same coin, and spoke equally to our own lust for deep experience and for transfiguring sex—for which transfiguring ideas were a not quite adequate substitute—though they were a passionately intense sublimation. The rationality and intellectuality of the fifties had helped to form us, but when Mailer wrote of love as "the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it," I was enthralled, while the qualified homage to violence a few lines earlier, which has angered moralists like Irving Howe, made no such impact. I had no need of it, and took no notice.

If a certain wryness has crept into my tone it's because I'm surprised by the distance between the person I was and the person I am. Rereading "The White Negro," *Eros and Civilization, Life Against Death* and other utopian works of that period, I'm impressed anew at the intelligence and style, the prescience and passion, of all this literature of cultural change, yet I find that it's lost much of its power to animate me. Partly this is because the sixties are long over. So much of what these men advocated has either been obscenely, obstinately frustrated or, worse still, has come to pass, with the mixed results we have come to expect in all human affairs. Communal life, the death of the family, open marriage, the politics of confrontation, educational reform, participatory democracy, mind-changing chemicals: all these promises have been simultaneously fulfilled and undermined. In some respects our society will never be the same; in other ways it never really changed.

Sexual liberation was surely one of these promises, and nowhere have our public values—and perhaps even our private conduct—changed more noticeably than here, but the sexual apocalypse at the

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end of the rainbow has not yet occurred, nor do I know what would happen if it did. Life goes on in the old way. I suspect even adolescents suffer in the old way, despite the evident new freedoms. Today when I read "The White Negro" or *Life Against Death* I can recall how much excitement I once felt, and feel some of it again, but it's distressingly hard to know just what the excitement was all about. Mailer's orgasm to end all orgasms, his hipster–psychopath's decision "to try to live the infantile fantasy," Brown and Marcuse's attack on the "tyranny of genital organization" and their paean to the "polymorphous perverse" sexuality of the infant, along with their fascination with Freud's death instinct: I find it difficult to imagine what these things meant to me, who had scarcely attained to the tyrannized state that they were attacking. To me they meant not some ontological breakthrough for human nature but probably just plain fucking, lots of it—in other words, just the opposite of what they said. I was sexually starved, though I hardly knew it, and these men seemed to promise that good times were just around the corner. Under the cover of grand ideas grand needs were making themselves felt. To recapture completely my feeling for these books would be to recapture my adolescence. It would be something of a sham. The sixties coincided with my own coming of age; I cannot depersonalize them; I cannot extricate them, try as I might.

V

I certainly don't mean to reduce enormously complex books like *Life Against Death* or *Eros and Civilization* to moments in my private history, but surely it was crucial for me that their exploration of "the ambiguities of sublimation" appeared at the time I was sublimating most ferociously—above all in the passion with which I threw myself into books like theirs. Nor can it be forgotten that their animus toward Freud's notion that civilization must inevitably be founded on repression came toward the end of one of the most repressive periods in American history, which both of them as old Marxists must have experienced with special force. Marcuse's allusions to the domestic cold war are veiled but unmistakable, and in a sense the whole social model he analyzes is a generalized form of American society in

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the forties and fifties, when the classic expectations of revolution defaulted, when "the goods and services that the individuals buy control their needs and petrify their faculties," when "they have dozens of newspapers and magazines that espouse the same ideals," when the "foe appears as the archenemy and Antichrist himself: he is everywhere at all times; he represents hidden and sinister forces, and his omnipresence requires total mobilization." Even Brown, whose book is far less political, writes in his introduction of having "lived through the superannuation of the political categories which informed liberal thought and action in the 1930's," but of being "temperamentally incapable of embracing the politics of sin, cynicism and despair" that followed. Clearly he sees the book as the prophetic and utopian equivalent of his former Marxism, an attempt to bring the thirties up to date.

The difference between Brown and Marcuse must nevertheless be stressed. Where Brown takes Marxism as one more set of symbols and categories, another anthropological system to be merged with Freud's, Marcuse sets out genuinely to historicize the Freudian categories, to turn them from absolute and timeless truths into an account and critique of a specific phase of our culture. Like the neo-Freudians they attack, both of them aim to complete the social psychology that Freud himself only began to sketch in his last two decades. Both undercut the merely therapeutic use of Freud that has prevailed since his death, yet neither is able to make the step from utopian theorizing about "the nature and destiny of man" to a more specific vision of the way people might actually live. This barrier helps explain why both later retreated from Freud: Marcuse into more conventional social criticism and Marxist militancy, Brown into Christian "body mysticism" and then back to sublimation, especially the conventional sublimations of the poetic imagination, which Marcuse too had fallen back on for the content of his future state.

However much we may criticize Marcuse's later work, at least it represents the development of a position, something we can differ with, while Brown's later career is in prose poetry, not in conceptual thinking. The rhetoric of the "Apocalypse" oration is breathtaking, the best Nietzschean writing since *Zarathustra* itself. Though we may legitimately ask just what Brown means by mystical phrases like "holy madness" or "second sight," as a trumpet call to renewal

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in the academy it is a worthy successor to Emerson's "American Scholar," with its message (which Brown quotes) that "the one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul." But *Love's Body* (1966) is as far beyond the renewal of institutions as it is beyond consecutive thinking. Instead it comes on as a new gospel, in which a vulgar Freudian mode of symbolic analogy gets applied indiscriminately to every corner of life, every institution in culture. Now and then the book makes some brilliant, witty conjunctions; but if every body in space is a phallus surrounded by a vagina, then this symbolism has lost all hermeneutic value; it becomes an unwitting burlesque of a certain post-Freudian rhetoric of interpretation. (Some recent French Freudianism has extended the caricature; it makes Brown look like a piker.)

The ingenuity of Brown's later poetics, however dubious, is sufficient to indicate how much of the success of *Life Against Death* stemmed from its own different but daring rhetoric. Brown is a devastating polemicist, a lucid expositor and critic, and a remarkable synthesizer of material from different disciplines. His reading of Freud has a fervor and dramatic excitement that Freud's own work eschews; it comes to us not as dry science, an analysis of the given, but as an evangel, a Bringer of Truth. After reading it I became a convert of sorts, and heroically preached a subversive doctrine of vitalism and sexual liberation in all my undergraduate and graduate term papers, finding the message (not without reason) in texts as diverse as *The Rape of the Lock*, "The Beast in the Jungle," and *Hard Times*. Poor disciple that I was, I remained quite oblivious to Brown's attack on "a program of oversimplified sexual liberation," which he attributes to Reich and early Freud. If the real message was "polymorphous perversity" I must have had a hard time making use of it. And by 1962, when I heard Brown himself (in a lecture at Wesleyan) allude disparagingly to "the academic author of *Life Against Death*," I knew the game was up. He had become a guru, hemmed in by flatterers, enveloped by pregnant silences, beyond ordinary discourse. He would never answer the questions he had helped to raise.

Marcuse's reading of Freud was less complex and drastic than Brown's; he seized and brilliantly appropriated only a few central strands of the Freudian system, and his political anchor kept him

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from getting utterly lost in cultural speculation, as Brown does by his last chapter. But for all of Brown's rhetorical and synthesizing power, it was Marcuse who came closer to unifying the themes of personal liberation and social change, authenticity and justice, in a way that anticipated the new heterodoxies of the sixties. Both the militants and the bohemians could fairly claim him as an ancestor. Marcuse himself was unable to maintain this remarkable balance. With the revival of the Left in the sixties his cultural interests receded before his political ones. Two later prefaces to *Eros and Cvilization*, written in 1961 and 1966, become increasingly strident in trying to reorient the book in a purely political direction. He may have been right in stressing that only politics provided an avenue for true change, but in his excitement at the revival of radicalism he all too readily identified his politics with the insurgent forces of the moment, whatever their aims and tactics. By 1974 he would theorize that feminism (or "feminist socialism")—previously unnoticed in his system, but now the last active remnant of sixties radicalism—was ordained to be the next stage of "the Revolution." Again and again he retreated from social analysis and from his own daring ideas into revolutionary clichés, the realm of the publicist rather than the philosopher.

In truth Marcuse had always been stronger as a theorist than as a social analyst or forecaster. *One-Dimensional Man* provided a valuable conceptual framework for looking at society, but like his other work it wasn't itself close to what was actually happening. Thus Marcuse's well-known oscillation between optimism and pessimism over the last twenty years, though it expresses certain interesting ambiguities at the heart of his thinking, is peculiarly empty in relation to the world at large. The optimism of *Eros and Cvilization* in 1955 was a utopian leap, based on an abstract reading of certain historical forces like the growth of technology. Though a speculative work, it remains more concrete and humanly specific than anything else he wrote. Despite the language of liberation, however, Marcuse did not anticipate the general liberalization of society that began to occur in the mid-fifties, especially in the sphere of sexual behavior and political expression. Later, in *One-Dimensional Man*, when Marcuse does take note of these changes, he is desperate to dissociate his own predictions from what he finds happening. By 1964, with everything beginning to open up, Marcuse is most deeply pessimistic. He dis-

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misses all signs of new freedom as "represssive desublimation," and finds absurd or trivial real-life examples that supposedly show whole spheres of human activity being "de-eroticized." Similarly, he dismisses the early countercultural manifestations, such as "Zen, existentialism, and beat ways of life," as "modes of protest and transcendence [which] are no longer contradictory to the status quo," and which therefore "are quickly digested by the status quo as part of its healthy diet." Nor does he take any note until his last page of the new political forces mustering on the margins of social power. Whatever seems better is objectively worse. In this book Marcuse's lumbering conceptual apparatus becomes his defense against the obvious; if at moments it keeps him from being taken in, it all too often prevents him from seeing straight.

In *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) the exact opposite occurs. The youth culture that society had digested in the previous book now becomes the agent of historical change, just when its disintegration began to be apparent to others. Reviving pre-Marxist theories of human nature, Marcuse now seeks "a biological foundation for socialism," grounded in the mores of the counterculture. The same dialectical machinery that previously found futility everywhere now finds revolutionary potential in every accidental trait of the young, including their use of dirty words, their dress, music, their supposed bathing habits, and so on. Aching to recapture his lost utopianism, Marcuse hitches his star to that of his young followers, translating their behavior into the language of German philosophy, often with ludicrous results. For social observation he substitutes a purely journalistic perspective; instead of theory he offers political rhetoric; ephemeral matters of fashion are hypostatized into world-historical developments in a way that, at its worst, rivals the fatuities of *The Greening of America*.

I'm well aware that I've applied harsher standards to Marcuse than to others I've written about here. This is because he promises so much: of the theorists who influenced the sixties Marcuse alone seemed capable of bringing Marxism up to date. That he failed to do that is no disgrace. At the very least he created a framework of analysis through which the cultural and personal dimension—the arts, the media, sexual mores, the use of leisure—could be integrated into social theory and political awareness. If his analysis could be

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mindlessly parroted by the new academicians of the Left, it would also remain a touchstone for those who could constructively refute or adapt it. Without rejecting Marxism, Marcuse helped radicals break with the old Marxist orthodoxies and think freshly about the novelties of their own modern situation.

With these last comments on Brown and Marcuse I've gone far afield from that transition period when the fifties began to break up in the realm of cultural theory. The late fifties were a fertile period, a seedbed of ideas that would burgeon and live in the more activist, less reflective climate that followed. A comparable breakup and transition could be traced in almost every sphere of American society during the same period: in politics, in education, in advertising, in popular culture, and in each of the creative arts. Sometimes the roots of change were not American at all. In film, for example, the influx of the new European directors—Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, Fellini, Antonioni, Bergman—inaugurated a golden age that included a rediscovery of these sophisticated artists' own American models. In literature the changes in national sensibility were reflected even more turbulently, as experiment and innovation jostled the conservative conventions of the postwar period. For those of us in college at that time the changes of adolescence—and the exhilarations of intellectual adolescence—superseded yet became interwoven with the problems of cultural change. It was an exciting time to be growing up—less stable than the fifties, less hectic than the sixties, but alive with possibility, rich with eerie dissonances between a still living past and a dimly apprehended future.

We are saddened by the death of our friends
Polly Cowan
and
Louis G. Cowan
a member of our advisory board
and for many years its chairman

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Mark Shechner

ISAAC ROSENFELD'S WORLD

When it came to reading books, Isaac Rosenfeld was the very best. Yet we scarcely hear of him now, twenty-one years after his death in a furnished room on Walton Street on Chicago's near North side. In recent years his reputation has gone into eclipse. Neither the collection of essays and reviews, *An Age of Enormity,* nor his novel, *Passage from Home*, nor the stories, *Alpha and Omega,* is currently in print, and there are no apparent plans to reissue them. Rosenfeld was thirty-eight when he died; that is, in mid-career. For fifteen of those years he had been a fixture in the Eastern intellectual establishment and for a time, even, a center of activity among the second-generation Jewish intellectuals who congregated in New York during the 1940s. He had broken in as a poet and storywriter for the *New Republic* in 1941 at the age of twenty-four and by the end of the war was a regular contributor there, as well as to *Partisan Review, Commentary,* the *New Leader*, and the *Nation.* If one counts all the briefest reviews, Rosenfeld's bibliography was considerable, though, as with many another writer who has had to hustle his living at the typewriter, many of his accomplishments appear now to have been unpremeditated triumphs of occasion. In fifteen years his productivity in fiction was small and uneven in quality, and as a critic he wrote neither a book nor many essays of more than a few pages. He was best known as a reviewer, and frequently enough of books that dropped rapidly from sight soon after publication, like Gladys Schmitt's *David the King*, Jo Sinclair's *Wasteland,* Marguerite Young's *Angel in the Forest,* Albert Halper's *The Little People,* and Nancy Hale's *The Prodigal Woman.*

Here, then, was a career whose profile sounds like a recipe for oblivion and for which too extravagant a claim should not be made. Rosenfeld's career *was* a small one, and its importance stands quite apart from the weight of its achievements. Instead of weight, Rosenfeld offers the fierce lucidity that belongs to distillations and miniatures, and to have come upon him suddenly, as I did some two years ago, is to discover a rich source of insight

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and clarity. Moreover, by assembling his essays, reviews, and fiction into the portrait of an intellectual and emotional life, one can see his career as emblematic, standing for larger historical designs. Rosenfeld's career took shape under the shadow of an extraordinary history, one that included the betrayal of the Russian revolution, the failures and eventual collapse of the American left, the rise and defeat of Hitler, the destruction of Europe's Jews, and the massive embourgeoisement of Jews in America. To have been a Jew and a writer at the end of the war was to be confronted by that history and forced to respond, and Rosenfeld was one who responded symbolically, with his whole being. He became the sort of Jew and writer that, as he saw it, the age demanded. *An Age of Enormity*, the selection of Rosenfeld's essays and reviews that Theodore Solotaroff published in 1962, is an important book for it concentrates the ephemera of Rosenfeld's scattered criticism into something that looks like an *oeuvre,* thereby becoming the distillate of that unique cast of radical, urban intelligence that was Rosenfeld's stock-in-trade. *Age* is also a workbook in the rhetoric of literary criticism; its shortest reviews are studies in subtlety, clarity, and economy. That this distillation of Rosenfeld's career, like the career itself, is fairly small, is part of its fascination; the book has all the charisma that belongs to both intensity and incompleteness.

By contrast, the fiction is not, for the most part, so happily rediscovered. It has been characterized in the past as a fiction of alienation, and it is just that. Its themes press as close to the experience of the isolated ego in confrontation with the void as anything the postwar generation produced, and yet it is largely an unsatisfactory fiction, as fumbling in its rhetoric and technique as the criticism is confident. It is a philosophical fiction that lacks a proper voice, or, at times, has too much voice altogether. Rosenfeld possessed a discursive, rather than dramatic, imagination and was better at explaining or arguing than he was at creating. *Passage from Home* is an especially shaky book. The open and leisurely form of the novel was apparently too spacious for an expert in concentration, and Rosenfeld, in the writing, seemed to tire of the ordinary machinery of story telling, especially in those long interludes between meditations on life in which his characters are sent out to act and speak on their own. The stories in *Alpha and Omega* are generally more satisfying though even there Rosenfeld's narrative voices —especially the nerveless style of allegory-in-translation that he cultivated for a while in honor of Kafka and Hesse—blunt the edge of his superb intelligence. Still, at least four stories: "The Hand that Fed Me," "Alpha and Omega," "Wolfie," and "King Solomon," strike me as good pieces of writing, though even among them, only "Wolfie" delivers the surge of feeling that we expect of the essays at their best. Finally, while some of the

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stories survive rereading, it is the criticism that comes back to our attention. If criticism can move, then *An Age of Enormity* is a moving book. It is the spiritual diary of a special state of mind: an energetic alienation that took its cues from deep emotional distress while insisting all the while on logic and analytic rigor in defining its predicament. That is, Rosenfeld's mind was analytic by way of being both rational and mercilessly diagnostic, and both in the service of warding off desperation.

As may be guessed from what I've just said, Rosenfeld was not a critic like Lionel Trilling or Kenneth Burke to whom one goes for broad syntheses; his reviews were never test borings for bigger explorations. Moreover, he lacked, or did not bother to cultivate, a sense of history and though he was for a time a student of philosophy, he had little talent for large, theoretical formulations. Rosenfeld cultivated inwardness and strove to perfect a personal responsiveness that would be ground enough for aesthetic judgments; his essays provide the view of a mind struggling to refine itself against the resistance of its own backward tendencies. Among other things, perfecting sensibility meant for Rosenfeld bringing the elements of his modernity—his psychoanalysis, his awareness of oppression and terror, his alienation, and his Jewishness—into full consciousness in order to comprehend their psychological presence within him and their impact on his own character. More than anything else, it is Rosenfeld's effort to define the twentieth century as a psychological condition of his own life that makes *An Age of Enormity* the absorbing book that it is.

Like so many Jewish intellectuals who came to political consciousness in the 1930s, Rosenfeld made a brief entry into radical politics and was active for a while as a Trotskyite in Chicago. But his Socialism, such as it was, seems to have been something of the sort that Alfred Kazin characterizes in *Starting Out in the Thirties* as a Socialism of atmosphere, an almost biological expression of a race, a moment, and a milieu. The testimony of his writing is that he was never committed intellectually to left politics and that he was therefore not much affected by its collapse in the early 1940s. It is hard for someone like myself who knows Rosenfeld only through his writing to imagine him at any time believing strongly in progress through social action, and I assume that his interest in political theory and organization did not go deep. Not that he was morally aloof from reality; certain crucial facts of modern life, like the normalization of oppression and brutality, were never far from his mind, and in fact constituted a grain of constant, personal terror about which much of his intellectual life grew. But certainly by 1943, when he appeared as a critic, organized politics had lost its appeal for him, and he never afterward alluded to it in writing with any enthusiasm. His 1947 story, "The Party," is about an unnamed political party that caves

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in when its members become bored; it is actually yawned to death by a caucus of younger comrades (who call themselves The Ennui Club) who can't stay awake during the national chairman's speeches. There is no nostalgia here for the meeting hall, but neither is there any sign of "political" disaffection, for Rosenfeld's criticism of the party was issued on such psychological grounds as rendered issues, as commonly understood, obsolete.

Rosenfeld has to be counted among those who, in the 1940s, imported psychology into the territory vacated by a retreating American radicalism. His essays and reviews were persuasive demonstrations of how psychoanalysis, mainly in its Reichian incarnation, might be used as a general criticism with application to culture, politics, and literature. Historically, the de-emphasis of social change in favor of self-adjustment may have been a requirement of Rosenfeld's era, much as it has been a feature of our own, but his adoption of psychoanalysis was no modish recycling of world views during a moment of historical shock, nor a retreat from analytic intelligence and moral expectation. In a review of Jo Sinclair's novel *Wasteland* (which he called a "drab but profitable little poem in celebration of the beatitudes of psychiatric social work") he complained of the easy complacency of postwar psychiatric rationality, declaring that "the transformation of 'change the world' into 'adjust yourself' has had the effect of abolishing concern with the kind of society that is worthy of our adjustment, and of removing the discussion of social problems from a historical context." Rosenfeld was resistant to the strains of social utopianism and adjustment psychiatry in the culture of psychoanalysis; he was sceptical of designs for general uplift and promises of personal contentment, this despite his deep yearning for détente with his own feelings. Rather it was the critical edge of psychoanalysis, its genius for unmasking motives and debunking pieties, that he found congenial, and accordingly it was the most radical, antinomian version of psychoanalysis that he cultivated.

That was in keeping with his deepest commitment of all, the commitment to his alienation, his constitutional inability to feel at home in the world. The Jewish writer, he declared with himself in mind, is a "specialist in alienation" which he called "the one international banking system the Jews actually control." He looked upon this alienation as both a handicap and an endowment, for it conferred upon the Jewish intellectual the gift of understanding: "It puts him in touch with his own past traditions, the history of the Diaspora; with the present predicament of almost all intellectuals and, for all one knows, with the future conditions of civilized society." Writing about *The Rise of David Levinsky,* Rosenfeld identified alienation as the secret of Jewish assimilation in America: a loneliness at the core of Jewish identity that spoke to the loneliness in the American heart and pro-

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moted the Jewish achievement of "a virtually flawless Americanization."

This alienation was a crucial leitmotif to which Rosenfeld always returned. He held it to be the irreducible condition of the emotions and the first principle of any respectable psychology or literature. And while an awareness of his own conflicts precluded the fashioning of a systematic politics or social philosophy—since the irony demanded by a dissociated sensibility sabotaged in advance all tendencies toward ideological consistency—it did allow him to frame an aesthetic, for in matters of art one can take a stand on one's own uncertainties, and even insist upon a literature that is true to the human facts of conflict, alienation, and neurosis. Alienation, as Rosenfeld understood it, was a constant property of the modern character, and fiction was character in action. Every writer was a man divided against himself, and his books communiques from a hidden battle front. (In fact, *The Enemy,* Rosenfield's second novel, which he was never able to publish, was an allegory of just such unconscious warfare.) Accordingly, the novel was a lesson in character and a blueprint for emotional management, and therefore subject to analysis as a successful, or failed, encounter with the instincts. Literature that did not acknowledge the struggle earned Rosenfeld's dismissal as minor, and he accused nearly all contemporary writing of lacking psychological validity. His criticism of the short story was typical. In two wartime reviews of Martha Foley collections he charged short story writers with having surrendered their creative resources to conventional formulas that undercut imagination and relieved them from having to respond to authentic psychological pressures. "The present collection [1943] offers very little evidence that these ideas symbolize crises in perception, moral anxieties, themes or fantasies deep in an artist's life: they lack the obsession of the personal." The vast majority of short stories, he complained, are academic, written according to learned techniques, and their meanings do not emerge from within but are laid on from without. Their characters, too, like their themes and situations, are only tidy contrivances, "receptacles for the flow of narrative and they never overflow, nor do they receive their fill."

He returned time and again to the failings of minor fiction, and several of his early reviews are ingenious dissections of the novel of manners. Two excellent essays on the English novelists, Charles Williams and Henry Green, define what Rosenfeld meant by minor fiction and its failings. "I should define a minor novelist," he began the Williams essay, "as a writer incapable of doing these two things at once—creating both art and life." The minor novelist is not deficient in talent, which he may even have in abundance, but in sensibility, that link between feeling and thought that establishes the texture of human meaning in his writing. The province of minor sensibility is style, in which the writer's efforts to distract himself from his

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own deeper meanings are put to work as personal, and finally public, entertainment. The minor novelist cannot confront sex without embarrassment or mannerism, and the aim of his technique is to exhibit his talent in order to mask deeper levels of preverbal tension. The potential achievements of such a strategy are limited. "For one thing a minor art cannot do is to create a sense of life out of its own aesthetic resources. Where a prior contact with reality and a deep grasp of nature are lacking, the only possible virtues art can have are those of style." Thus, the effect of technical mastery in art may be to balk larger creative purposes by denying emotional sources, and therefore meanings. "This is an old trap of the language bound: where words come first, they can never point beyond words—which is what communication means." The minor novel's popular acclaim and dominance of commercial markets, moreover, is its reward for successful avoidance. Author, critics and readers alike are participants in a conspiracy of the repressed.

Such an aesthetic owed a considerable debt to Wilhelm Reich and what was then known as vegetotherapy (later orgonomy) which Rosenfeld encountered at about the time he was abandoning whatever he possessed of Socialism. It was through Reich that Rosenfeld gained the theoretical leverage to turn a native self-estrangement into a morality. And it was a morality that licensed the book review to become a comprehensive social criticism, for Reich's character analysis was linked to a theory of culture and its taxonomy of character types to a rudimentary theory of style. It allowed the novel to be regarded as a document of the writer's relation to his instincts, and the writer as a stand-in for a system of culturally-sanctioned rules for being civilized. Fiction was thus an extension of the culture that produced it, and its shortcomings were symptoms in which the character neuroses of a society were reproduced in miniature. Accordingly, Rosenfeld's early reviews measure fiction against a therapeutic standard: full genitality. And they appropriate Riech's bio-energetic dualisms to measure imaginative success: organism vs. mechanism, potency vs. rigidity, flow vs. blockage, release vs. restraint.

Minor fiction was the perfect patient upon whom to practice this diagnostic criticism since the common ills of minor writing seem to lend themselves to description in the psychodynamic language of force and resistance. Style, the theory claims, belongs to the ego and therefore to the fragile and threatened surfaces of the personality. Style *is* resistance. In diagnosing the minor sensibility in action, where conflicts in purpose seem to account for those flirtations with meaning known as mannerisms—that is, where art is patently laid over emotion or thrown up as a screen against it—Rosenfeld found in character analysis (that is, the influential 1945 edition of Wilhelm Reich's *Character Analysis*) an especially useful theory of literary style.

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The essay on Green was the fullest articulation of this psychological aesthetic, but evidence of its underlying dynamic and its characteristic vocabulary are everywhere. Even André Gide, hardly a minor writer, could be described as a victim of blockage: "We get the deliberate pressure and the deliberate withholding, but not the natural ease. In place of ease stands embarrassment." Other writers are guilty of unblocking only minor channels, such as Nancy Hale in whose stories "the surface tension mounts, as in a glass, reaches its climax, breaks, spills over—but at no point is it more than water," or Ivy Compton-Burnett, whose "manner comes naturally to her in a steady trickle." Christopher Isherwood's *Prater Violet* displays a more satisfactory relation with instinct; in it, the portrayal of Friederich Bergman "is a work of joy, and the result is sheer overflow."

However much he deplored the timidity of British fiction in facing emotions and sex, Rosenfeld was much tougher on American writing where a vaunted sophistication about psychology and frankness about "life" turned out often enough upon examination to be mere attitudinizing. Writers like Kenneth Patchen, Henry Miller, and John O'Hara came especially under fire for failing in their accomplishments to live up to their self-advertisements. Rosenfeld accused Patchen, in *Journal of Albion Moonlight* and *Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer*, of treating psychoanalysis as a grab bag of titillations to be reached into only for Gothic decorations, thus turning the categories of psychological understanding into lurid confirmations of human bestiality. "Accordingly, Patchen's terrors are always on tap. Though he appears to draw upon the subconscious as the source of his images and obsessions, he actually uses it as a storehouse for artificial props, constructed, I dare say, quite consciously." Henry Miller is both praised and dismissed as a talented poseur who, in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, palms off as insights commonplaces about American society that are already stocks-in-trade of *Life* magazine. And John O'Hara's sketches in *Pipe Night*, of the authentic life of our times as recorded in busses, trains, gin mills, and nightclubs are too obedient to literary requirements, which just happen to be commercial requirements as well, to do the job of social analysis. O'Hara, Rosenfeld charged, builds his images of America upon the literary premise of bittersweetness—the convention that toughness and sentimentality must go together—which conveniently protects his readers and himself from nasty doses of reality. O'Hara's "realism" turns out to be just real enough for a public that is disposed to look upon poverty in the light of romance, as a form of "roughing it." These were all well-deserved judgments that have stood up well with time and all point to the same quality in American fiction that Rosenfeld was quick to criticize: the oversold quality of its "impact" and "insight" and its propensity to congratulate itself for nonexistent achievements.

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The full weight of Rosenfeld's contempt was reserved for Irwin Shaw, the "left-wing middlebrow" novelist whose formula for commercial success: Hemingwayesque sophistication, Jewish issues, and *New Yorker* taste, yielded great book-club profits just after the war. The failures of Patchen, Miller, and O'Hara to produce convincing fiction were primarily their own, whereas Shaw's shortcomings, as Rosenfeld saw them, were also representative of a newly-ascendant social class, and his writing a profitable defense of its values: an unexamined patriotism, a smug liberalism, and a hard-boiled *savoir faire.* That is, the upbeat values of the bullish market of cultural fashion. It was not the values *per se* that Rosenfeld found offensive, for, after all, liberalism, patriotism, and know-how are not such bad things, but the style that made them popular commodities, one that devalued emotion and conflict while claiming to be hard-hitting. Shaw's style made a pretense of knowing the world by way of a markedly American brashness-in-complacency, a "guts and dry martini attitude toward life." "He knows everything; that is to say, sex and liquor. He has had all these commodities, not without enjoyment, of course, but nevertheless with just that properly arch touch of weariness, lest anyone think him naive." What Shaw pioneered so successfully was a literature that appeared to grapple with issues while being really shy of moral struggle, for the *New Yorker* sophistication of that era put all struggles behind it. Indeed, his values themselves are hardly affirmed since they are never tested; there is little more to them than the self-congratulation of the upwardly mobile. Thus Shaw's moral conclusions are prepared in advance, and the conflicts through which he marches his characters are contrivances only for purely narrative suspense.

Despite obvious differences, the emotional dynamics of American and English fiction are revealed by Rosenfeld's psychological aesthetic to be quite the same; only the mannerisms differ. Among the Americans, straight-talk or its simulacrum as in O'Hara and Shaw or the rush of apocalyptic fervor as in Patchen and Miller—that is, the deliberate underplaying of emotion or its overdramatization—are cultural artifacts that allow real psychological or social conditions to be evaded under cover of aggressive confrontation. The English novel, by contrast, covers its retreats with satire or waspishness or prose. Such characterizations sound like psychologized stereotypes, and Rosenfeld's analyses do sometimes recall popular myths of national character. Style in English fiction is made to sound like a headlong flight from feelings into idiosyncracies, while the hardboiled realism and psychologism of the American novel are taken to be trumped up effects, propaganda for emotions that can't be truly represented. To the extent that these are stereotypes, they contain an element of applied Reich, especially where Rosenfeld's diagnoses imply the modal character types of *Character Analysis*—hysterical,

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compulsive, phallic-narcissistic, and masochistic—and where the Reichian vocabulary of blockage and flow does the work of interpretation.

But Rosenfeld's criticism was always more than applied Reich, for where Reich was all dynamics and therefore subject to vulgarization, as his own later career seems to demonstrate, Rosenfeld's first premises were always literary and cultural, premises of taste and sensibility to which the libidinal dialectics lent support in the form of biological confirmations or, more consistently, as useful "as if" metaphors. It is hard to know at any point just where the Reichian system is being credited as a moral science and where it is only a rhetorical convenience, and Rosenfeld himself may have been in some doubt. But where psychic conflict is boiled down to a schematic battle between the liquid and solid elements in human nature, as it is in orgonomy, psychoanalysis is being invoked at its weakest point, that of closet resemblance to the classical psychology of humors; Rosenfeld never came to the point of fully subordinating his exquisite discriminations to Reich's clumsy diagnostic machinery. In a review of Arthur Koestler's *Insight and Outlook* (which is not reprinted in *Age*), Rosenfeld rejected the view that art, morality or other products of human intelligence could be accounted for on neuro-physiological grounds. In all such matters, he announced, he stood for the primacy of philosophy over physiology and against any theory "that does attempt to express a neuro-physiological counterpart for aesthetic value." Such criticism of Koestler obviously applies also to Reich and his bio-energetics, and it appears to me that the bulk of Rosenfeld's essays, despite their penchant for exposing resistance, and their persistent applied hydraulics, owe little debt to the pseudo-medical side of Reich's thought. Though in facing his own repressions Rosenfeld availed himself of the benefits, such as they were, of the orgone accumulator, as a critic he had no need of biological or cosmic potentialities; he possessed from the beginning a far more complicated and tragic view of motives and defenses than could be derived from simple libido, or orgone, theory. His criticism, finally, no more resembles Reichian character psychology than imagination resembles, say, pressure, or literary style resembles the brute recalcitrance of armor. His wish to recover the body for literary criticism may have attached itself to a therapeutic ideology that lay stress upon the unbinding of energy, but at no point did it confuse thinking, feeling, and imagining with the mechanics of tension reduction. Aesthetics enlarges science, Rosenfeld declared in the Koestler essay, "For the strength of a theory of art lies not in its structural underpinning, but in the directness with which it allows values to come into their own."

Rosenfeld's insistence on directness in meaning had consequences in the way he himself wrote. He was a superb writer of English prose: he culti-

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vated its resources of texture and rhythm and had, in his criticism, as clean and hard a style as any of his contemporaries. His fiction, by contrast, is marked by mannered and pretentious styles that reveal his strictures upon directness and authenticity to be exhortations to himself, but his criticism was obedient to his own lessons about style as resistance. Rosenfeld's criticism featured what I would call a styleless prose, by which I don't mean an absence of style so much as a perfection of it. The effects he cultivated, like the epigram, read like natural properties of language rather than adornments, and his prose accordingly bears no obvious signature of his genius except its subtlety and its economy. Like many another second generation Jewish intellectual he subjected the English language to his mastery as an act of aggressive assimilation. Indeed, the Jews have become to writing in America what the Irish have long been in Britain: masters of the language of the dominant culture. Rosenfeld was one of many who took possession of Henry James's language without at the same time caving into Jamesean fastidiousness. There is a strong impulse toward Anglophilia among Jewish-American intellectuals that is built into the logic of their Americanization, not the least part of which is their romance with the language, but Rosenfeld never responded to that cultural possibility as did, say, Lionel Trilling. Rather, he collaborated in the more customary Jewish project of synthesizing an intellectual culture out of James's English and Dostoevsky's pessimism. That marriage of American high-style and Eastern-European *Schmerz* was responsible for much of the best in both fiction and criticism that the second generation of Jewish Americans produced.

Inevitably, the contrast between Rosenfeld's clarity as a critic and his patent artificiality as an author raises questions about his own relation to the aesthetic he so incisively applied to others. By his own definitions he was a minor writer, being unable to create both art and life at the same time. His intention was to write a fiction of alienation, but few stories succeed in bringing his conflicts to life; most do little more than announce them. In the main, the stories are cold tableaux of isolation and failure, peopled by passionate and lonely characters who are cut off from their energies and denied, by circumstances or impotence, the comforts of human companionship. These impotent heroes include an ownerless baseball team that plays out a losing season for lack of anything else to do; a brigadier of a nameless army in a nameless war whose passion to know the enemy leads him to torture his captives but yields him no knowledge; a railroad traffic controller who is self-exiled in lonely cabooses; a political party whose motto is "Ends Never Meet"; a scholar of the dance who dies of paralysis; a Greenwich Village raconteur who cannot touch the woman he loves and gives her instead to another man. The stories themselves run to the surreal and Kafkaesque;

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their emotional underpinnings are bleak indeed. But with some exceptions, this bleakness is highly mannered; it announces its alienation but gives us "literature," and in the process casts a strange light on Rosenfeld's insistence that fiction ought to live.

That contradiction brings Rosenfeld's criticism into focus as both self-exhortation and evidence for analysis. The essays and stories seem to constitute a dialogue in which Rosenfeld's potentialities are thrown into relief by his difficulties and the deeply personal nature of his principles made plain by his failure to realize them. That dialogue discloses the stiff barriers to feeling behind the pleas for clarity and the emotional tremulousness within the call for joy. Rosenfeld wrote best when his personal investment was easiest to disguise, where his subjects were sufficiently distant to allow his meanings to come forward as objective criticism. In fiction, where his themes were painfully personal, he offered up style as a supplement to directness, showing, in effect, just how literary neurotic conflict could be. One suspects from Rosenfeld's fictional styles as well as from his enthusiasms —Kafka, Gide, Hesse, Tolstoy, Y.L. Peretz, Sholem Aleichem—that he entertained the fantasy of being a writer in translation, a European who had only been imperfectly rendered into English. He did find greater ease in using distant modes and explained in an essay on Gide that " . . . the self is naturally on guard, and to force down its guard is to violate its natural posture. But the imagination betrays the man; the more objective its work and the more distant from the personality, the smaller the suspicion with which it must contend and the greater the personal revelation."

The essence of Rosenfeld's criticism was just such an alertness to the dialectics of telling and hiding, a heightened sensitivity to the tug and push of a mind that it itself both subject and object. He always looked upon style as the posture of self-encounter. Thus he analyzed Hemingway's famous laconic style as a pretense toward absent feelings, a way of implying an emotional life that did not exist but had to be invented by readers. "So good are the credentials of this style," he observed, "that we honor it with our whole experience." But in fact, he added, the hard-boiled prose is not just a stylized passionateness, that is, a way to imply feeling by withholding it, but an acknowledgement that nothing is deeply felt.

> The style covers up this starvation with the honorific leanness. Dividing its skill between the suppression of feeling and the presentation of the clear, clean impression for which Hemingway is famous, it becomes a paraphrase of his philosophy, which considers emotion a disgraceful epiphenomenon, and holds a man to be most human when he is most like wood.

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Such a sensitivity to the tactics of style was enormously resourceful, and yet it had limits, for the leverage it afforded Rosenfeld against the defensive stylists like Hemingway or Irwin Shaw was of no use against those writers who had shown the virtues of obliquity, ambiguity, and complication: the modernists. Rosenfeld had nothing to say about modernism as such, or about Eliot, Joyce, Pound, or Proust, in particular, and had praise for Lawrence only as an ideologue of the orgasm. Gide, about whom he did write, he approached through the journals only, and read as a case study in the transmutation of neurosis into art. Moreover, Rosenfeld, in company with most of his generation of Jewish, left intellectuals, had nothing important to say about poetry. But of course, this is an overstatement, and the conspicuous exceptions are instructive. Delmore Schwartz, the only poet among them, wrote copiously about poetry and modernism. The art critics, Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg, were important critics of modern art, but then, what competing "humanist" tradition was there for them to deal with? But those who focused their attention on fiction and politics, the usual combination, had little or nothing to say about poetry, modernism, or the major modernist writers. The novel only, and primarily the naturalist or realist novel at that, was the place where culture, morality, and politics were defined, while poetry, to the extent that it lacked explicit social content and achieved its effects by rhetoric, was outside their scope

The rationalist in Rosenfeld was always suspicious of the aesthete in him and he seems to have chosen his subjects for review as though his aesthetic sense were under quarantine. Having committed himself ferociously to the championship of innerness and energy, Rosenfeld had no vocabulary for dealing with stylistic innovation. In matters of style, evidence of strain or resistance or evasion, which he uncovered everywhere, was interpretable psychoanalytically—the ego was always guilty of mismanaging its fund of instinct. But where symbolism was more an issue than statement, and artifice, indirection, and even concealment were aesthetic virtues, Rosenfeld had little to say. Very likely he was an unannounced enemy of modernism and looked upon it as did Ortega, as the dehumanization of art. Clearly, Rosenfeld and most other left intellectuals who wrote for *Partisan Review,* the *New Republic*, or the *New Leader* in the 1940s and 1950s, held philosophical realism to be the major tradition in the novel and the most moral in virtue of its potential for education. For all that they may have admired Joyce, they rarely wrote about him.

The critical feature of Rosenfeld's modernity, as I see it, was his repulsion by the modern world and his refusal to collaborate with it. In the '40s he was indistinguishable from his contemporaries in his conspicuous alienation, the Jewish intellectuals' shorthand for their exclusion from and their

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disdain for the main currents of American life. Alienation was the mark of their exile and their caste. In the 1950s, when universities, fellowships, and publishing opportunities opened up to them, their alienation lost its rhetorical credit, and their militant aloofness crumbled before their opportunities. Notes from underground are not customarily issued from high places. Yet Rosenfeld stood apart from the new order of things and applied himself to psychological needs that could not be met by position, comfort, and respectability. His experience of alienation cut deeper than the shared rhetoric of his generation, for it issued from his struggles with himself rather than his quarrels with the world. A representative figure in the 1940s, an itinerant intellectual with only a *Weltanschauung* to call home, he drifted in the 1950s from the center of the intellectual culture to the periphery, allowing the era of prosperity and accommodation to pass by without him. "No matter where he was or what job he had," observes Solotaroff, "he kept himself in the clear, taking risks of instability and independence, or uncertainty, sterility, and failure." While others made their peace with upward mobility, Rosenfeld warred against its seductions in a private battle whose victories and costs were known only to himself and his family. It is difficult to know what to make of his example, for what looks like paralysis from one quarter may appear to be heroism from another. After his death, Saul Bellow praised him in a brief *Partisan Review* obituary for not having followed "the fat Gods" and interpreted his stubborn refusal to be reconciled to the new order of things as courage, and its consequences as victories of the spirit. And so they may have been. But Rosenfeld himself was not delicate about emotions and understood well enough that heroic abstinence was a sign of trouble.

Instead of the fat Gods, he followed an austere personal logic that comprehended both psychoanalysis and Jewishness, and indeed held them to be complementary glosses on the same reality. His Jewishness was not a received attitude; it had nothing in it of easy piety or easy comedy. Nor was it even a clearly defined quality. It had constantly to be grappled with, revised, and, most importantly, imagined. It was a severely literary Jewishness, pieced together out of folklore, myth, and fiction, especially out of Franz Kafka, Sholem Aleichem, Y.L. Peretz, and Isaac Babel. Nowhere was Rosenfeld's total imaginative response to the objects of his contemplation more evident or more touching than in his writing on Jews. In a story about his boyhood, "The World of the Ceiling" (*Midstream,* 2, 1956, not reprinted in *Alpha and Omega*), he recalled the intensity of his early literary fantasies, his pleasure in imagining himself a revolutionary in Czarist Russia, hiding out from Cossack patrols, hopelessly in love with the dark-eyed Yevgenia Borisovna, the darling of the organization, who is unfortunately "as cold as

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she is beautiful and knows only one love—of terror and reckless action." But usually there was little to his Jewishness of romance, though the distant beauty of the Yevgenia Borisovnas remained, transformed from an image of unrequited passion into a measure of inner distances. His fiction and criticism alike are haunted by phantom mothers, vanishing or untouchable women, and vacancies of the heart, or the mouth, or the bowels.

An essay on *The Rise of David Levinsky* and one on the Jewish culinary obsession and the mysteries of *kashruth* entitled "Adam and Eve on Delancy Street" were examinations of that empty center, the insatiable hunger that Rosenfeld identified as the source of his alienation. Rosenfeld was a dialectician of food and despair, the first literary intellectual to turn the psychoanalytic connection between hunger and culture, loneliness and success, to critical use. The Kosher laws, he observed, are symbolic sexual taboos, and the ritual prohibition against eating meat with milk really an insurance policy against sexual transgression—no mixing allowed! Similarly, the Jewish insistence upon eating is so much displacement, a simulated hunger that cannot be satisfied because it is not real but has to be patronized by generous offerings of food. He called it "the hunger that was not a hunger." This insight was seized upon some years later by Philip Roth who elaborated it into the wild alimentary politics of *Portnoy's Complaint*, where food embraces a universe of sexual delicacies and moral discriminations. The essay on *The Rise of David Levinsky* struck a more complicated and somber version of that note. The hunger is not only insatiable, Rosenfeld claimed there, but is itself the object of desire.

> Thus Levinsky is a man who cannot feel at home with his desires. Because hunger is so strong in him, he must always strive to relieve it; but precisely because it is strong, it has to be preserved. It owes its strength to the fact that for so many years everything that influenced Levinsky most deeply—say, piety and mother love—was inseparable from it.

Or, as he epitomized it in a phrase, "The hunger must be preserved at all cost."

That is as fine an insight into Levinsky's character as, typically, was available to Rosenfeld: where insight followed self-analysis and his own troubled nature was the clue to the interpretation. Witness his own dogged resistance to satisfaction and his dedication to preserving the hunger at all costs. "All his life," he says of this stand-in Levinsky, "he is at loose ends, and expert only in ennui, which Tolstoy defined as the desire for desire, cousin to his yearning."

Where emptiness and depression are the nightmare, fullness and vitality are the dream, and Rosenfeld knew the one as intimately as the other.

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Which is just as we would expect of a manic-depressive. It was the manic in him and its extraordinary influence upon those around him that emerges from the testimony of his friends. But like all manics, he paid the depressive price. The depressive side of Rosenfeld was more reclusive; its retreat and habitat was his writing. There, at any rate, is where we discover it.

Through most of the 1940s the expansive Rosenfeld was sustained by his reading of Reich whose concept of character was more or less that of a balloon; it saw human nature as swelled by eros from within and held taut by resistance at the outer boundaries. The balloon character gave Rosenfeld a fine way to imagine his exuberance and his alienation; exuberance was overinflation, depression depressurization. But by the end of the decade, Jewishness had replaced mental health as his ultimate sanction and orgonomy had given way before Chassidism as the justifying myth of his vitalism. Solotaroff has called Rosenfeld a Chassid and that seems to be right, especially as Rosenfeld came to imagine his manic vitalism to be a phase of his Jewishness. One of his important reviews in 1949 was of Maurice Samuel's *Prince of the Ghetto*, a retelling of the stories of Y.L. Peretz, the Warsaw social worker and intellectual whose writing was popular among Jews around the turn of the century. (This review is not included in *Age*.) Though Peretz's social views were consistent with those of a progressive, Europeanized intellectual, he had devoted his literary career to telling Chassidic tales of rabbinical wonders. Such a double career appealed to Rosenfeld as all psychic balancing acts did; it was another image of a mind in contradiction, whose means of resolution might be a model for his own. Peretz's synthesis, as Rosenfeld saw it, was a brand of secular religiosity that yoked the idea of an indwelling God, a piece of divinity within each man, to a cultural nationalism that had the Jews becoming more European by becoming more Jewish. Peretz did not share in the transcendental rabbinical tradition, but did identify with its enthusiasm which he valued as over against "the bourgeois spirit." The complexity of Peretz's character and achievement spoke for Rosenfeld's own ambivalences: "It was balanced between the sacred and the secular, radical and conservative; his expression as a poet and intellectual, between the religio-mythic and the sociological." The synthesis lay in Peretz's character itself, which embraced a naturalistic vitality which "took the Chassidic ecstacies not as ultimate things, visions in the midst of appearances, that disclose the noumenal world, but rather as the immediate phenomena in a radiance of this world."

If Rosenfeld had a rabbinical strain in him it was of the sort he identified in Peretz, that of the awakener and enlightener—the unlocker of creative energy. He shared with Peretz an intense commitment to the "joy in this world, the eros and agape at one in nature." Indeed, it was precisely this

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brand of electric naturalism that Rosenfeld's Chicago friend, Saul Bellow, working out the terms of such a secular enthusiasm, has exploited most successfully in his novels. The language of the urban erotic in *The Adventures of Augie March* is applied Chassidism of a sort that Bellow may well have owed to the influence of Rosenfeld. Indeed, the logic of this enthusiasm, its potential for epiphany, is developed further in the closet transcendentalism of *Herzog* where the noumenal world peeps out shyly from behind Chicago's phenomenal skirts, and, most recently, in *Humboldt's Gift,* where it blossoms into a full-blown Platonism. It is not surprising that Rosenfeld, in praising Peretz, turned to religion for the language of secular vitalism since only religion has the conceptual tools to exploit the experience of true elation, the sense of ineffable fullness. "The vision is strictly of appearances in actual historical time, but they are seen under a holy light." Chassidism and liberal pragmatism meet in the "power of love, drawn from the eros of Chassidism, and fulfilling for Peretz the function of attracting the nations into brotherhood."

This was the expansive Rosenfeld, riding the crest of an ecstasy which was the fullness of God, and yet it was the same alienated Rosenfeld who was so haunted by loneliness and hunger. The vital and the desolate were the same man, just as Franz Kafka and the Chassidic wonder rabbis are phases of a common Jewishness, the depressive and manic potentials of the same culture. Rosenfeld was given to wild swings of mood—from exaltation to despair or terror from which middle terms were readily cancelled out. That instability at one point got sublimated into theory and Rosenfeld became for a while a totalist of the emotions and an enemy of mediated feelings, which he equated with disguise and avoidance. In 1948 and 1949 his contemplation of the Holocaust and recent revelations about labor camps in the Soviet Union brought the polarizing tendency of his imagination to the surface in the form of a proposal for a new totalist ethics. In a 1948 review of Jacob Pat's book *Ashes and Fire*, he argued that the knowledge of the destruction of Europe's Jews, which the world now possessed, was sufficient cause to scrap "the wilderness of good and evil, of ethics and morality, of reason, science, method, history, sympathy and mercy, the whole human world, or what was, until now, human." For the whole symbolic superstructure of civilization had been laid bare and shown to be inadequate to reality; it lacked the power to explain, or mitigate, the terror of the zero moment when all had failed, and, at the edge of the grave, there was only the scream of ultimate terror. The only choice for the survivors was to face and accept this new reality and reach beyond obsolete emotions and consolations to the only good that is adequate to such a reality: joy. "How shall we, living in comfort, we American Jews and Gentiles, with brotherhood and

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interfaith meetings—and in an election year!—understand that there are only two principles?—terror and joy.'' That the logic of such a position is, to say the least, weak, is self evident. That it owes its rhetoric to Nietzsche is also evident. Rosenfeld, suddenly confronted by the upwelling of a political horror that had become a personal, psychological property, recoiled by becoming, briefly, a Nietzschean spokesman for ''terror beyond evil and joy beyond good,'' declaring that ''that is all there is to work with, whether we are to understand what has happened, or to begin all over again.''

In a subsequent *Partisan Review* essay, ''The Meaning of the Terror,'' Rosenfeld came out from behind the reviewer's desk and broadcast a manifesto on the moral imperatives of the new age, proclaiming that the holocaust was the signal for a new moral dispensation in the West and calling upon modern man, full in the knowledge of terror, to now learn the shudder of ecstasy. ''Our joy will be in love and restoration, in the sensing of humanity as the concrete thing, the datum of our cultural existence. It will lie in the creation of a new capacity, proof against terror, to experience our natural life to the full.'' Stirring words that, not unexpectedly, fail to stir. There was something wrong here, a note of impatient declamation that rendered the whole exercise unconvincing, even comical. Too much terror was being denied and too much abstract, hypothetical joy summoned from too deep an abyss; the terror was real enough but the joy was little more than an aphoristic vehicle, unreal, ahistorical, and impersonal. Needless to add, this invalidation of all traditional ethics and the making of a new morality in a mere thousand words, was an exercise in rope dancing that not even *such* an expert in concentration could bring off. Western culture was not Rosenfeld's field and he was always on surer ground when he scaled his vision to human proportions—to the individual and the specific. The idea that joy could be brought out of terror, which is mere desperate posturing at the level of ''Western Man,'' could, for example, yield trenchant analysis at the level of the single book or author.

Thus it was that George Orwell earned Rosenfeld's praise for his accomplishment in writing *1984*, when, at the door of death, he confronted the horror that totalitarian politics bred in him and snatched a grace beyond the reach of English decency and fair-mindedness. What was achieved in *1984* was the double revelation to Winston Smith in the extremity of torture that ''the objective of power is power'' and that he, at the end, ''loved big brother.'' For Rosenfeld, that last realization was the secret of totalitarianism, its power to invade the minds of its victims and become their conscience and arbiter of their wills. Rosenfeld was greatly moved by Bruno Bettelheim's account of the victims' behavior in the camps, the regressions to childhood among the imprisoned that held them divided against each other and ren-

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dered each jailer a father, tormenter, and friend at the same time. "A prison camp," Rosenfeld declared in an essay on the Soviet and Nazi camps, "is a kindergarten in a slaughterhouse, in which the penned must go round and round in a forced march to childhood, regressing to what they never were . . . that there may remain no interval of time or reflection between the word of authority and the obedience." Orwell's apprehension of that reality and his horror at it had, in past writing, been held in check by habits of good sense and optimism. Elsewhere, as Rosenfeld observes, his anger did not rise above the note of "You don't do such things!" Only in the last extremity, his tuberculosis unquestionably terminal, could he break free of lifelong habits of restraint to summon up the terror. "Life being what it is in our world, the onset of death is often the first taste a man gets of freedom." That was the freedom, not only to grasp the forbidden secret of modern politics, that "the objective of power is power," but also to torment himself for a lifetime of denials. Through his own sickness Orwell penetrated to the heart of the world's sickness and released a flood of truth that had been withheld from the other Orwell, the journalist. What mattered in *1984* was Orwell's achievement of imaginative depth, not his fidelity to history or politics.

> All that matters is the force of the passion with which the man, who began as a writer in a small way, at the last came through. The force with which he ended is the one with which greatness begins. This force, it will be observed, was enough to kill a man.

One is brought up short by such an aphorism, for it is a portentous phrase that calls up Rosenfeld's own eventual isolation and death. According to the testimony of his friends, Rosenfeld's last years were bitter ones, marked by stubborn self-denial and gradual self-defeat. After 1951 his work slacked off, or, at any rate, became more private. There were certainly fewer reviews. He began work on a book on Tolstoy which he did not complete. His second novel, *The Enemy*, turned out to be unpublishable. Despite his considerable reputation, Rosenfeld could find no publisher to take the book, and those excerpts that have appeared, with their flat-footed allegorical prose, explain why. His marriage broke up and he drifted from New York to Minneapolis, where he taught briefly at the University of Minnesota, and then back to Chicago. Like Bernard Miller, the youthful hero of *Passage from Home,* Rosenfeld had to leave his father's house in order to return home, only to find there, not the tears of joyful reconciliation, but a confirmation of his exile. He was apparently planning to leave Chicago again just before he died.

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Rosenfeld spent the 1950s in drift and dishevelment amid small, dingy rooms. Yet there was a principle of perverse monasticism in this life. As Bellow noted, here was a disorder that had ended up by becoming a discipline. We ought not be surprised. The therapeutic radicalism of Rosenfeld's youth was built upon a deep strain of Puritanism and it is not hard to see how a disciple of energy might in time wind up mortifying the senses in squalor and purifying the emotions in abstinence. For what the culture of the orgasm and monastic withdrawal share in common is a wish for purification. The first promotes decontamination through the genitals, the other through the bowels. Rosenfeld was not the first to demonstrate that a hedonist could also be a monk. Here, then, was a sort of religion after all, a courting of the spirit that demanded a renunciation of all but essentials. But life itself, with all its necessary compromises, deceptions, and contaminations, may, under such a regime, be inessential.

Rosenfeld half wanted, I think, to be a saint. The demands he placed upon himself—to seek joy through terror and to refine thought in isolation—can only have sainthood as their goal. He denied the world's nurturance; at first lest it disappoint him, later, lest it compromise him, and substituted for the sustaining relationships of an ordinary life, rites of purification. He set out to purify his style, his courage, his passions, his sensibilities. In time, each failure to achieve beatitude, or genius, only brought a redoubling of the effort and a deepening of the isolation. For the hunger had also to be preserved, since it was the original condition under which his struggles took on meaning. Rosenfeld's early death of a heart attack seems to have been the fulfillment of the impossible logic of these crisis years.

He knew something of what that logic entailed. In writing of Simone Weil, with whom he shared a genius for self-denial, he refused to sentimentalize her sainthood at the expense of understand its component of ordinary neurosis. " . . . How can our world speak of Simone Weil without using its own language, in which the words, severe and unforgiving though they may be, are, by definition, hysteria, masochism, etc.?" Weil's sainthood, her abstinence and eventual starvation, defined a personal sanctity but lacked sharable significance. "For all her firsthand knowledge of politics, exile, and universal doubt, she made her way out of our world and ceased to represent it." Rosenfeld was speaking here out of his own experience of private beatitude and public irrelevance, for, as his own conflicts deepened, his solutions grew increasingly private and his writing more fitful and hermetic. The problem with *The Enemy* is that it was written in too private a code; its appreciation required not readers so much as initiates.

There are signs that in the final months Rosenfeld experienced a breakthrough of sorts, or at very least a remission of conflict that showed up in his

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writing as a relaxed and genial manner. One of his best stories, "King Solomon," was written during this period as was the draft of an essay, "Life in Chicago," which is included in *An Age of Enormity*. Rosenfeld's King Solomon is a foppish old Jew, an overweight, cigar-smoking, pinochle-playing monarch who can barely recall his former wisdom but is still beloved by young girls who come from all over Judea, or is it Brooklyn, to lie beside him and place their hands on his breast. At the age of sixty he is courted fiercely by an overblown, bejeweled Queen of Sheba, a former Jewish princess who has left himself go a little and who, for all her wiles, cannot arouse in him the passion to get up from his pinochle. But there is little tension in this; Solomon's pain is only a distant, geriatric melancholy. This king is the Emmett Kelly of biblical patriarchs. Rosenfeld's Chicago too is a typical creation. It is Janus-faced in having a dry and land-locked midwestern side and one that is wet, lake-lined, and eastern—such a schizoid Chicago as a Rosenfeld would discover. The themes here are Rosenfeldian enough but in both cases the pressure of urgency has gone out of the writing and in its place is an unexpected acceptance: "King Solomon" is only gently ironic and the Chicago essay is cool, urban sociology. There is no way of knowing from the writing alone what sort of change we're seeing or what brought it about, though I am inclined to be sceptical of most claims for breakthrough. Nor can one say what new creative potentials were set into play by the new mood, though the story and the essay are evidence that something significant was possible. But Rosenfeld's heart attack cut things short and permanently shaped his career, the major feature of which is the brutal, downward curve of depression.

Yet that is what makes Rosenfeld so exemplary a figure. The pursuit of innerness with such devotion is rare in any case and the sheer intensity of Rosenfeld's quest calls attention to it. That the visible product was small was in keeping with the venture itself, one of distilling life into its essentials. Such a stripping bare was a ritual enactment of a fantasy of culture—a graft of guilt and mourning upon his genius leading him from one rite of purification to another in search of the essential man, and Jew, within. Rosenfeld's essays and stories were reports back from some beleaguered *stetl* of the soul where intense, bearded men still swayed over their Torahs in the musty *schuls* of exile, believing yet that their scholarship, their disputation, their enthusiasm for righteousness mattered greatly to God. Possessed of that fantasy and the sense of unspeakable loss in which it took root, Rosenfeld mythicized himself and became, at least emotionally, the last ghetto Jew. In other words, he found his cultural identity among the realms of his own dead, which, for an American Jew in search of himself in an age of so much enormity, was not so implausible a thing to do.

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POEMS

Michael Lally

SUPERREALISM

First of all I'm naked
while I'm typing this,
only my rash is airbrushed,
the rest is visceral energy
for my poetry, in this case
depicted objects of tough minded
harsh light that emphasizes
the previous generation of
dismayed bridegrooms at the
altar of the cosmic alienation.

I mean for instance me,
and Winch, and our contemporaries,
were tuned up by neosurrealist
poets, trite poets, hardnosed
rugged individualist poets and
ironic pap poets of the 50s and 60s.
We apply the new techniques,
along with a thorough knowledge
of consumer products that share
the airless synergetic crackle
of methodologies, to our experiences
like cosmetics in the undertaker's
steady but too subjective grip.

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Actually I'm cold sitting here
at the typewriter on my lunch hour
naked and exhausted from masturbating
all morning to create the right mood
for poetry uninvolved in the ego
like the "actualist poetry" of the
early 70s with which I was associated
without my foreknowledge or permission
or agreement or even knowing what they
meant by that term. It had something
to do with the reproduction of
objects in "the poem" as though
they were "actual" not *transcendy*!

In some poetry circles craftsmanship is
considered to be a dazzling array of
chromatic effects that draws our attention
like a physical presence, but to us
superrealists on the nonhierarchical
ladder of self esteem the elusiveness of
technique in a savage amalgam of clarity
avoids value judgments as to what ought
to be deceptive or enthusiastic toward
the unimaginative and divides the universe
into something spilled and something
wiped up. This is one example.

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Dick Gallup

WHAT THE DICKENS

It's nice to sit down in the evening
With the rain out of doors
And the dog lapping water from the toilet bowl
To a dinner given in your honor

Everyone sits around in the dark
Trying to guess who's speaking from the sound.
Ah! Mr. Steinmetz is here. Hear the thunder
In his voice! The red dot of his cigar
Moves up and down as he speaks:

"In the shadow of the lake great mists
Of electricity rise toward evening
The birds get nervous and the oars
Of the boats get stuck in the water."

Words boil around the table in response
Till, in a quiet space, only the rain
Is heard to speak softly in the trees.

It's that I like, and the way the sugar
Lies in the bowl waiting for coffee
Which, when it comes and the lights
Are turned up, shows that I am alone

Reading a newspaper headline,
"FIREMEN CHOP DOWN BLEAK HOUSE"

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Cortnie Lowe

SELF-PORTRAIT, AN INTRODUCTION

there is an eye there, an eyebrow
and I think my mouth, yes, I see her
draw herself up to the mouth, and open

her legs, one line among the lines of my face to tell you
why I place her here, I would have to say she placed
herself, and yet it is I sign her, I sign her

"woman," as though without me
she would not be naked
but hide her name, say "woman"

but in another language
in another way may mean "to be," or a flower
I don't know, but certainly somewhere something

enough man to hold on my brow
although too near the eye to see, I am afraid
the rest suggests the sea, perhaps other

shapes a mermaid takes when a man, and next to him
softer forms, fur, or a bit below the head
the head of cupid, cupid shoots

like vines or thick hair
the inevitable depth
straight to here
where you can see
as in the picture
one side of everything is black.

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Howard Moss

THE RESEARCH OF DANCERS

The dancer's leg stops in mid-air.
The library researcher looking up
Something or other in the catalogue
Decides to take a five-minute breather.
He walks out past a famous painting.
Meanwhile, elsewhere, things are getting done:
The snow is kept from falling through nets
At an Aero-Biotic Arctic Station,
A fish is taught breathing at Yale . . .

Can countries be scrapped in favor of people?

How sure are the dance floors under the dancers
When it's heavy going in an arabesque?
How grimy are the nails of the librarian
Always a hairsbreadth away from genius?
You'd think they'd come clean, turn white from awe.

Are thoroughbred horses being born somewhere
Too fabulous to need articulation?

The dancer's foot has been suspended too long;
He longs for a resolution—an ending.
And the librarian's data must be done by dusk—
He, too, has a serious place to go home to.

For the dead, taps and reveille are one.

As the dancer places a tentative foot
On the floor of the stage, it rises to meet it,
The inanimate everywhere shudders awake,
The library stacks have just been struck
With their first good idea for a book in years;
Outside, the straw is dreaming of bricks,
As if it, too, had been activated
By beautiful, personal, spontaneous forms.

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Two Poems by Alberto de Lacerda

COMPLETELY NEW

To enter a completely new place
Through a door never previously
Imagined
(To be able to float
Finally)

To light the lights
The gods let go out

To inhabit the recesses
Fear had refused

There
You will find
The wrinkled hands
Of the new born the old and of certain
Statues
That the centuries have loved
After a fashion

To the desert I'll bequeath
My empty hands:
Successive
doors
and doors

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SUMMER

To Menez

Summer in the amorous
Battlefield
Healer
Reclined (so beautiful)
along the entire universe

Summer-swan
Desire
Rising slowly
Until the just
Midday is reached

Robert Muller

A POPULAR THEME

From my doorstep, at twenty,
Swinging in and out of the pastoral setting;
My father gone, my mother waiting idly
Beside the buzz of a hazy world—
Perceive it—at twenty—surrounded
By weak prospects and thin possibilities,
Caught by hours on end in the old vacuum
Of human stone—I hold myself
By the waist, about to be sick,
Dizzy over the chemistry's inevitable solutions,
(My mind is glass against the moon),
Begun in twenty themes of a process
Where nights still named positions
Of deformities dragged deeper into sleep.

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Two Poems by Celia Gilbert

THE SOLITARY ONE

For so long the ground was worked,
then, growth bestowed itself
not as recompense but
generosity.

Cactus
with your aureole of spines
only the air
dares embrace you.

SHE COMES TO HIM ON THEIR ANNIVERSARY

Gloves tossed away,
open, rapturous, empty hands.
Water glass by the bed.
Something old at last broken.
Something new, at last, joined.
The bridle is worn,
the land bows its neck, gleaming.

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Steve Hamilton

AT RANDOM

Of postures taken
Little indication was given
We were to spend hours watching slender
Black lines erratically divide fields
Of primary color. Clouds pursued me
With insinuations of previous neglect
Like a dried wash rag limply hanging
From a towel rack. As if I could no
Longer remember what year the war
Would start again. As in it has all
Passed before you. Miles of cows
Digesting undernourished grass and still
Somehow growing fat. Doesn't the land-
Scape want to be popular? Is this what
My forefathers have left me? Maps,
And a pair of eyes looking at you as
If to doubt death would ever be enough.
As in O, insomnia, so lovely of you!
And beautiful, too, like an angel's
Grief under an old-fashioned it is not
Sufficient to feel that. One more
Cheeseburger eaten as you combat
A formidable swarm of gnats. What, me
Retreat? You will never see the day

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Because it is endless night where
I am leading you. I have had enough
Of these yous. Boredom has decreed
The universe is angry, licking
The green purple and blue from a
Butterfly's wings. Once I believed
Everyone had smelled it. And then
All of a sudden when I did something
They did something and when
I went out they wanted to know where.
As if morning had reared its ugly
Head. As in I don't care, this is
Where the new life begins. O lethargy
When you whisper my name I come running.
But if tin soldiers have rights
In the inanimate structure of things,
Then let my inertia speak for them.

"Ah, radiant green weed drifts
In a crystal bowl where goldfish live.
I am in love.
It is not like singing; it is
Instrumental, sounds lying.
I am lying.
I am lying paralyzed on your veranda,
Parallel to the earth
Which is taking advantage of me,
Like an old story in which
You aspire to nothing more than everything.
Someone please come
Take these clothes off of me,
I can't feel them anymore.
You are putting on airs as though to be
Confusion in the midst of irrational sanity.
I am bored with you.
My name is Maria, I am nine years old."

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Arthur Vogelsang

AUGUST, N. LINN ST.

Storms averaged two hours, fat
Hours heavy with extra minutes.
Two women were alone in the poem about Iowa City
In Iowa City itself ha ha. They
Were beautiful, weren't they, as they smoked cigarettes
And walked under the jungle-like trees
In the middle afternoon? In the town.
The somewhat personless town
Was green as you stood,
Wherever you stood, like green water deep over the roofs,
And they were smart, they
Were walking fast, they were baring
Their emotions and laughing like laughter
Was the beautiful penis that broke all hearts.
A friend says this happened.
"I was miserable,"
One of the women told him, "we both were,
So we took a walk." The bar's diabolical clock (a
Local myth) was slow a half hour every afternoon
Then caught up
Or that afternoon quietness raised its own skirt
When the rain came onto the street like a loud silly car
And in the hollow uninhabited dark bar
They told him this, even how the previous rain,
In the morning, swelled and warped the day.
I don't know which.
The story is so embellished by now
That the women wear shorts and are crying, smoking,
And moving along under the trees.

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Ann Kim

TERPIN HYDRATE

long october evenings, a cold bay wind pushes
a thousand candles across water
a shrub opens in the sky.
undone by a tall romance of night, swallows
craze steep streets, stun themselves
worse than the watchers on glass balconies.
then a hundred tiny breaths
make circles of dark mist windows
and its time to read céline again and its time
deep in a chrome yellow couch.

oh, his livingrooms all were leather,
and his floating hair
full of lilies of the valley, think,
but on formal evenings,
he presented his card, a clear bauble
like max ophuls' left eye,
then knelt to place a purple rose
under the heel of my nearly empty heel.
and many the small psalms of praise, like hands
everywhere. that touch
the roof of your mouth

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Philip Haskell

DOPPELGANGER

Again sometime in June, a street,
Empty, with traffic lights changing,
Someone has probably seen it here before,
That one glove in winter
From time to time on lobby floors or sidewalks,
Or that telephone, ringing and ringing in a telephone
booth.
Word in someone's pocket
May have been here always,
All summer, on cancelled stamps
Bringing it nearer, though the wavy lines
Did not hint of this,
And never once brought face to face
Did it show up, at least to me,
In the mud flats of a dead mirror,
No. With August now it's here again,
Or still, and why this cake,
The child among the shadows,
Or what it means this time,
Don't ask. The light
From twenty-nine candles fills the room.

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Michael Rosenthal

VIRGINIA WOOLF

It is only recently that Virginia Woolf emerged from the limbo of polite esteem in which she has generally been held into the forefront of the contemporary cultural and literary scene. Having languished for decades in the shadow of her august fellow modernists like Joyce, Lawrence, and Conrad, Woolf appears at last to have secured for herself the stamp of the authentic classic that had previously managed to elude her. The obligatory if slightly stale respect invariably accorded her by readers has now given way to a passionate, searching interest in every aspect of her life. The torrent of Newsletters, Quarterlies, Miscellanies, English Institute Conferences, and Modern Language Association Sessions, among other forms of tribute, attest to her arrival. Virginia Woolf is a very hot literary property indeed.

The impulses behind this adulation are worth exploring, particularly as they tell us a good deal more about our world than they do about Woolf. To begin with, it is clear that the rediscovery of Woolf is part of the larger phenomenon of the canonization of Bloomsbury which has been in process for the past seven or eight years. If we want a specific date for its beginnings, we could point to the publication of Holroyd's biography of Lytton Strachey in 1967. It is a marvelous irony of social history that Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury associations, which for years had damned her in the earnest eyes of the Leavises and others, now constitute one of her strongest sources of appeal. For reasons that are less literary than cultural, the cloud of moral opprobrium shrouding Bloomsbury's work and activities has lifted, revealing not a horrid group of jejune inverts but an emancipated, highly civilized group of friends leading productive lives free from the taint of pieties and conventions. No longer viewed as a sign of degeneracy, their legendary polymorphous perversity is taken as an admirable example of a highly desirable freewheeling personal and sexual style. Exemplary indeed, not cautionary, as Nigel Nicolson's best-selling portrait of the unusual relationship between his parents indicates. At a time when all instances of traditional sexual

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stereotyping are being exposed, Bloomsbury's precocious versatility is thought to have much to teach us.

The current public enthusiasm for Bloomsbury has been nourished by the scholarly mills which have been producing biographies and volumes of letters and journals with regularity. More remarkable than the sheer number of these is the commercial success they achieve. People await the newest revelations about the personal intrigues with much the same eagerness as Dickens's readers anticipated each new installment by the master. All things bearing the Bloomsbury label have demonstrable value as collector's items, so that even the office boy at the Hogarth Press, as well as the Woolfs' maid, have been enticed to come forth with their reminiscences of what that fabled world was like. It is probably fair to say that the renewed interest in Woolf on the part of the general reader is more a function of her position as "high priestess" of the chic, provocative Bloomsbury way of life than of any developing awareness of the inherent merit of her fiction.

If sheer titillation accounts for much of the public's attention, the gradual realization that Virginia Woolf was, in fact, a woman writer (or at least not a man, the androgynous theory having its own advocates) has also played a substantial role. The polemical grinder of the feminist movement has greedily devoured Woolf, spewing her forth as the appropriately committed feminist whose preoccupation with the cause is somehow the key to her fiction. Such a view of Woolf is not particularly useful. It is of course true that she was very much concerned with the economic and social plight of women and deeply sensitive to the psychic crippling inflicted on them by a male dominated world. *Orlando, A Room of One's Own, Three Guineas*, and assorted essays eloquently testify to her involvement in these issues, as well as to the deft way she can expose the absurdities of our culture. But as a novelist Woolf does not inveigh against the horrors of masculine constraint; to focus on her fiction through any sort of politicized feminist lens is seriously to distort it. Woolf herself deplored novels that preach, and hers are conspicuously free from the proselytizing that frequently occupied her when she was not at her desk struggling with her fiction. This is not to argue that Woolf was not conscious of the assumptions of an environment which held, for example, that Virginia's brothers, but not Virginia, should go to university; it is simply to protest against the reductionist view that Woolf's novels primarily speak in any essential way to feminist preoccupations. Woolf, in fact, hated the word "feminist" altogether—"What more fitting than to destroy an old word, a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its day and is now obsolete? The word 'feminist' is the word indicated."—finding it divisive and inimical to the overall unity of civilized people she so desired.

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The feminist claim on Woolf has lately been joined by the androgynist, which sees Woolf's novels as endorsing the splendors of the androgynous mind as a palliative to all our ills. Taking as a seminal passage Woolf's discussion in *A Room of One's Own* of the healthy adult mind being able to transcend any narrow sexual role, the hunters of androgyny doggedly chase the metaphor through all of Woolf's fiction, hacking out new patterns of meaning as they go. But metaphors are better left in peace to illuminate the specific contexts in which they appear. The illustrative use of androgyny to represent the kind of wide-ranging, nondogmatic, resonant intelligence Woolf finds admirable cannot be generalized into establishing Woolf's "androgynous vision." To discover that Woolf believes that men and women should share a complex view of reality, one as free as possible from the parochialisms of any single sex, is not to discover anything very new about her work.

If Woolf is to survive as other than a precious oddity of the modernist movement, it will be neither as a member of a coterie, a radical feminist, nor a prophetic androgynist. Sexual ideologies and exotic ambiences aside, Woolf's fiction must be able to meet the reservation still shared by many and most recently expressed by Elizabeth Hardwick in *Seduction and Betrayal:* acknowledging the richness of Woolf's language and the glow of her genius, Hardwick goes on to say, "yet in a sense, her novels aren't interesting." Whatever else novels are, they should at least be interesting, and it is a fact that hers have not always been thought so. Woolf was herself aware that her work posed more than the usual difficulties for readers. Her diary notes with sympathy (and some irritation) the puzzled efforts of critics to comprehend what she is doing. The problems are real, and a passage from *Between the Acts*, her last novel, suggests what they are: "Did the plot matter? She shifted and looked over her right shoulder. The plot was only there to beget emotion. . . . Don't bother about the plot: the plot's nothing." Isa's reflection on the meaning of Miss La Trobe's pageant at once describes Woolf's own art and points out the greatest obstacle to its appreciation. For plot is indeed nothing in Woolf's fiction and character, Isa might have gone on to say—or at least character as traditionally conceived—not much more. Novelists who dispense with both of these staples are going to have difficult times, and Woolf has received her share of critical abuse for writing novels in which, it is argued, nothing happens.

Not, of course, that she is the sole practitioner of the twentieth-century novel to have abandoned established notions of plot and character; the modern novel clearly developed through precisely such liberties, but in many ways her work is the most radical. For despite the formal breakthroughs made by Conrad, Ford, Lawrence, Joyce, and others, their work

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still exhibits a basic narrative interest (perhaps *Finnegan's Wake*, a fictional cosmos unto itself, could be considered an exception) which is almost entirely lacking in Woolf's. However complicated the point of view and richly patterned the symbolic structure, their novels essentially remain part of a story-telling tradition from which Woolf dissociated herself. We are impelled through *Ulysses* less by its dazzling virtuosity than its abiding concern for Leopold and Stephen and what befalls them, just as we are absorbed in the destinies of Paul Morel or Decoud or Lord Jim or Benjy or even Winnie Verloc as they go about their muddled business. Although they do so in a variety of innovative ways, the great modern novels of the twentieth century implicate the reader in the lives of their characters as they confront experience, and in the problems of choice and self-definition that confrontation engenders. "Yes—oh dear yes," E.M. Forster writes in *Aspects of the Novel* with bemused resignation, "the novel tells a story." Subtilized and internalized though it is, the primitive energy of the story animates most of modern fiction.

Woolf's novels, however, contain no substantial narrative impulse. In a very real sense it is true she does write novels in which nothing happens. It would be impossible, for example, to speak in any serious way about the sustained "action" of *The Waves* or *Between the Acts*, or even of a more manageable novel like *To The Lighthouse*. Her work contains little humor, passion, or particular dramatic or even ideological tension. Demanding everything and making few concessions to readers, it seems to many hermetically sealed in its austerity and fragility from the vital currents of life. Woolf recognized, of course, that in writing novels that lacked any strong narrative thread she was cutting herself off from one of the enduring appeals of fiction, but she had no difficulty making this choice.

As an artist Woolf was obsessed with what we can call formal rather than thematic concerns, with finding ways of embodying, as she says in her diary, "the exact shapes my brain holds." That Woolf was absorbed primarily in creating shapes is what makes her such an utterly original voice in modern literature. It is also what makes her such a difficult writer to talk about, for her work does not readily lend itself to critical analysis of character or theme or philosophy. The difficulties are not simply ours: certainly Woolf's own language fails when she tries to formulate for herself her fictional intentions. Reflecting in her diary on Arnold Bennett's criticism that *Jacob's Room* doesn't have characters that survive, Woolf agrees that she hasn't "that 'reality' gift. I insubstantiate willfully to some extent, distrusting reality—its cheapness. But to get further. Have I the power of conveying the true reality." If distinctions between 'reality' and 'true reality' are seldom satisfying, this at least has the virtue of suggesting what

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one should *not* expect from a Woolf novel. Other attempts to state positively what she wants her fiction to achieve are no more successful:

> That is one of the experiences I have had here in some Augusts; and got there to a consciousness of what I call 'reality': a thing I see before me, something abstract but residing in the downs or sky . . . in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me; that which I seek. But who knows—once one takes a pen and writes? . . . Now perhaps this is my gift: this perhaps is what distinguishes me from other people. I think it may be rare to have so acute a sense of something like that—but again, who knows? I would like to express it too.

The reality Woolf wants her fiction to express cannot easily be formulated apart from the particular way it inheres in each novel. It is not a substantive vision of the sort J. Hillis Miller, in his *Poets of Reality*, finds in Conrad's fiction, whose "aim is to make the truth of life, something different from any impression or quality, momentarily visible. Not colors or light but the darkness behind them is the true reality." Woolf's reality has nothing to do with stripping away illusion or penetrating surface phenomena to unearth the grim darkness beneath, but resides in a form which makes comprehensible the way the various impressions and colors and darkness together constitute the texture of human life. It is something which is communicated emotionally rather than intellectually: "When we speak of form," Woolf writes, "we mean that certain emotions have been placed in the right relations to each other; then that the novelist is able to dispose these emotions and make them tell by methods which he inherits, bends to his purpose, models anew or even invents for himself." Endlessly evolving new techniques to dispose these emotions, Woolf succeeds in making out of the chaos and disharmony she found in the world marvelously coherent shapes.

The center of a Woolf novel, then, does not reside in any of those several themes frequently singled out for critical investigation—the workings of consciousness, the perception of time, the quality of personal relationships—but in her effort to orchestrate these in such a way as to make us feel how together they constitute part of the experience of living. The quest is always for the form that will embody Woolf's sense of what that experience is. From *Jacob's Room* to *Between the Acts*, every one of Woolf's novels originated not with any notion of theme or character but with some notion of the form the novel might take. As she indicates in her diary, *Jacob's Room* developed out of three short pieces she was working on even as she was struggling through to the end of her second novel, *Night and Day:*

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> I'm a great deal happier . . . today than I was yesterday having this afternoon arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another—as in an unwritten novel—only not for 10 pages but 200 or so—doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want. . . . Conceive (?) "Mark on the Wall," "K.G.," ["Kew Gardens"] and "Unwritten Novel" taking hands and dancing in unity. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover; the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance two weeks ago.

Similarly, her first intuitions about *The Waves* were purely formal ones:

> Why not invent a new kind of play; as for instance:
> Woman thinks . . .
> He does.
> Organ plays.
> She writes.
> They say.
> She sings.
> Night speaks.
> They miss.
> I think is must be something on this line—though I can't now see why. Away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel and a play.

Or consider her early sense of *Between the Acts:*

> Will another novel ever swim up? If so, how? The only hint I have towards it is that it's to be dialogue: and poetry; and prose all quite distinct. No more long closely written books . . .
> It came over me suddenly last night as I was reading . . . that I saw the form of a new novel. It's to be first the statement of the theme; then the restatement; and so on: repeating the same story: singing out this and then that, until the central idea is stated.

Before there is theme there is already a vision of form, and even after the substance of the novel has been thought out the commitment is always to the design.

Such a commitment does not make her, as many have claimed, a theoretician of the novel. Intuitions about form affect her in much the same way as a fresh image will stimulate a poet's creative process. Neither an abstract nor purely intellectual fascination, formal considerations provide Woolf with the emotional and imaginative impetus into each new book. Her absorption with formal matters makes the thematic content of her novels relatively unimportant to her fictional inspiration, and it is a fact that

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such content does not alter radically over the course of her lifetime. Although intended somewhat flippantly, her diary note that *To The Lighthouse* contains "all the usual things I try to put in—life, death, etc."—is very much to the point and might well have been written about any of her works. What distinguishes them is less the things themselves than the different patterns they achieve in each novel, the relationship she fashions between them. The impulse behind every work is always to find a new method for rendering her sense of experience: once a form has been fully worked out, Woolf moves on to a different attempt. Each experiment, she writes in her diary, is "a shot at my vision—if it's not a catch, it's a cast in the right direction"—and represents a shot she will not repeat a second time. A London day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, the passage of ten years on an island in the Hebrides, the makeshift, harried performance of Miss La Trobe's pageant—each constitutes a unique version of Woolf's remarkably steady perception of the world. The extraordinary structural diversity of *Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To The Lighthouse, The Waves, The Years,* and *Between the Acts* paradoxically attests to the underlying singleness of purpose Woolf held to throughout her career.

Woolf's own quest as an artist—to create shapes that will make lasting sense of the fluidity of life— is reflected within her novels by people who are engaged in the same kind of search. Insofar as it is possible to generalize about the meaning of the human activity in Woolf's fictional world, we can say that the characters in her novels constantly try, through widely different means, to establish for themselves from the chaos around them a coherent grasp of their world. What Woolf attempts to accomplish through her fiction, Lily Briscoe attempts with her painting, Bernard with his novel, Miss La Trobe with her pageant. And although these are the specific aesthetic endeavors which most closely approximate Woolf's own, the instinct to bring things together is not limited to painters and writers. Certainly it is the animating principle behind the soliloquies of all the voices in *The Waves*, not just Bernard's, and is what impels that superficially least creative of souls, Clarissa Dalloway, to give her parties. Most memorably, of course, it is Mrs. Ramsay's particular genius, possessing as she does the ability to "choose out the elements of things and piece them together and so, giving them a wholeness not theirs in life, make of some scene, or meeting of people (all now gone and separate), one of those globed compacted things over which thought lingers and love plays."

The workings of the creative imagination shaping different visions of order, then, is the single great theme which appears in Woolf's fiction. The importance of that imagination in her work comes directly out of the overwhelming sense of human isolation in which every novel is steeped. Whether

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it is Jacob searching for himself, or Septimus and Rezia unable to talk to each other, or Giles and Isa struggling in their tempestuous marriage, or even Mrs. Ramsay, giving of herself to exhaustion, the people in Woolf's fiction invariably feel cut off, not only from other human beings but from the world around them as well. The fact of isolation and the possibility of fleeting transcendence and communion—these are the two poles of Woolf's fictional universe. Rooted in one, characters can earn, through their own arduous efforts, brief contact with the other. Scratching out its monotonous "Unity-Dispersity . . . Un . . . dis," the gramaphone of *Between the Acts* actually lays out the psychic contours of all of Woolf's mature work. "Scraps, orts, and fragments," as Miss La Trobe's pageant insists, the isolated selves in Virginia Woolf's world grapple not only with their own inadequacies and fears but with the uncertainty of personal relationships, the intractableness of language, the fact of death to achieve their completed visions. The battle is difficult—filled with the same kind of loneliness and pain Woolf experienced in her own life as she fought her way through the demons of madness and despair that constantly assailed her to the lucid forms of her fiction—and the successes transient; but there is nothing else. Whatever the suffering involved, all the novels from *Mrs. Dalloway* on manage to end on a final note of affirmation: a party is given, a lighthouse reached, a pageant produced. Such accomplishments, however trivial they might appear, suggest the basic commitment to living made by the fiction. As Lily Briscoe understands after she has finished her painting, it does not matter in the least whether the canvas is ultimately destroyed or rolled up in some dusty attic. In Woolf's universe to be able to say, "I have had my vision," is the consummate human achievement, and Lily's words, which close *To The Lighthouse*, speak not only to her particular feat in completing her canvas but to the successes of the other protagonists as well and finally, of course, to Woolf herself.

They could not be reasonably applied, however, to Woolf's first two novels, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919). If D.S. Savage is perhaps unduly harsh in finding *Night and Day* to be the dullest novel in the English language, it is nevertheless true that her first two books are not particularly distinguished. Lacking any kind of formal originality, both are lamentably tedious, dragging on far longer than they should in a thoroughly pedestrian manner.

Although Terence Hewet's notion in *The Voyage Out* that he would like to write a "novel about silence," about "the things people don't say," seems to anticipate Woolf's later development, neither of these initial efforts suggests the unique things to come. What they do make clear is how uncongenial the realistic—or what Woolf might call the Edwardian—

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method of fiction was to her genius. For Woolf, conventional techniques could produce only conventional fiction. It was not until the publication of *Jacob's Room* in 1922 that she felt, as she notes in her diary, that she had finally learned "how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice." Irrevocably turning away with *Jacob's Room* from the established tradition within which *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* were written, Woolf devotes the next nineteen years of her life to exploring the different possibilities of that newly discovered voice.

Jacob's Room is the first of her novels which tries to dispense with what Woolf calls the "appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner." Her well-known rejection of the realist method—enunciated most emphatically in two essays, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and "Modern Fiction"—claims that in its attention to the superficial and mundane, realism fails to catch the vital experience of living itself. Trotting out her favorite trio of Edwardian villains—Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy—in both essays, Woolf demonstrates how they frittered away their talent "making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring." In a word, they are *materialists*, devoting themselves with varying degrees of success to the pursuit of the unimportant. Opposed to these are writers who, like Joyce, are spiritual, who understand that life is a far more curious and fluid affair than the stolid materialists would have us believe. The mind does not function according to rigidly defined patterns, Woolf declares, but rather receives "an incessant shower of innumerable atoms," so that if a writer were not constrained by convention and forced to follow prescribed directions, "if he could base his work upon his own feeling . . . there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it." Neither unique to Woolf nor by any means a theoretical principle she holds to in her own criticism, such an argument is primarily an intensely personal assertion of what her own fiction will be. Implicitly, we cannot help but feel it is also a way of absolving herself from continuing to labor in the direction that the rather dismal *Night and Day* and *The Voyage Out* suggest she could not manage very happily.

Employing techniques of point of view and organization in *Jacob's Room* that she had tentatively experimented with in "Mark on the Wall," "Kew Gardens," and "Unwritten Novel," Woolf attempts to embrace the "unknown and uncircumscribed spirit" of life by avoiding much of the prosaic connective tissue necessary to most narrative fiction. There is nothing particularly startling (there never is in Woolf) about the subject of the novel: *Jacob's Room* is about Jacob Flanders, vaguely modeled after Virginia's brother, Thoby, whose life we follow from infancy through his years at

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Cambridge, his abortive love affairs, his travel in Greece, his work, and finally to his death in World War I. But of course the story, such as it is, does not absorb Woolf's energies any more than it does ours. The interest of the novel lies in the way Woolf presents the story of Jacob, in her efforts to find a form that would adequately express her vision of reality without falling prey to what she considers the deadness and waste of the realist method.

Although strictly chronological, moving from childhood to death, the chronology of *Jacob's Room* has nothing to do with the linear chronology, for example, of *The Old Wives' Tale*. For rather than giving us a story moving smoothly and continuously through time, Woolf presents us with a series of discrete moments, one following another, with little concern for the links between them. The chapters, though proceeding in a chronological way to record Jacob's development, exist primarily as separate entities, each focusing on specific events in Jacob's life or in the life of his friends. And what is true of the succession of the chapters is true also of the organization within the chapters themselves. Transitions are generally suppressed as the narrator jumps from character to character and from incident to incident without hesitation. The basic unit of organization is the isolated moment, and each chapter consists of a number of these, dealing with Jacob, or his acquaintances, or even passing strangers who make one brief appearance and then leave the novel entirely. Time moves forward in this novel, but in an extremely discontinuous, jerky manner.

The jaggedness of the narrative is deliberate, not a thwarted effort to write a smoothly flowing lyric novel. It represents Woolf's first attempt at creating a form which would in itself reflect the nature of life as she understood it. The form of *Jacob's Room* is clearly designed to parallel the "form" of living: a fragmented, discontinuous world demands a fragmented, discontinuous novel. A world in which people experience time as a succession of distinct moments strung together must be embodied in a fictional world similarly constructed. Such a notion of form is, of course, painfully rudimentary; just how rudimentary can be seen by considering the kinds of rich, complex forms Woolf goes on to evoke in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* to deal with essentially the same kind of world *Jacob's Room* is treating. Although managing for the most part to avoid the realist dead end Woolf abhorred, *Jacob's Room* nevertheless fails to achieve an aesthetically satisfying shape. Discontinuity is not in itself a particularly useful structural principle for a novel, and the different techniques Woolf borrows from her experimental short pieces are not able to provide an extended fiction with the compelling form necessary to her successful work. The novel's episodic organization does not add up to a structure that can find in the discontinuities significant patterns that imprint themselves on the imagination.

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If the novel succeeds in documenting the isolation and the fragmentariness of existence, at the same time it does not embrace them in an affecting, substantial form. An important new direction which helped Woolf to break free from the confines within which she had been working, *Jacob's Room* is finally a sterile form, one not capable of the resonance of her mature work.

But Woolf learned her lessons well and her next effort, *Mrs. Dalloway,* achieves a formal coherence and power altogether absent from *Jacob's Room.* In place of the flaccid chronological organization covering all of Jacob's life, *Mrs. Dalloway* effectively focuses on the events of one day in the lives of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith. Digging "caves and tunnels" beneath her characters, Woolf creates a densely structured texture in which a June day in London is constantly informed by pressures and vestiges of the past. The novel is complexly organized both spatially and temporally. Physical meetings of characters in the street—and finally in Clarissa's home—merge with a web of intersecting memories and reveries to create a form that succeeds brilliantly in conveying Woolf's sense of the isolation, ironies, and ecstasies of life. Implacably tolling out the passage of time throughout the book, Big Ben punctuates the reflection of individual characters with its unyielding insistence on the passage of time. In addition to the mundane purpose of announcing a shift of narrative focus from one character to another, the gonging serves to emphasize the restricted framework of a single day which Woolf's imagination exploited continually during her career for her best work. It is significant that Woolf's four most distinguished novels—*Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves,* and *Between the Acts*—essentially take place, either metaphorically or actually, within a twenty-four hour period. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts,* of course, do so explicitly. Although ten years elapse between part One and Three of *To The Lighthouse,* the novel imagistically follows the movement of an entire day from the late afternoon of the first part, through the dark night of the second, to the early morning which opens the third section. And the nine poetic interludes of *The Waves,* describing the progression of the sun across the sky, clearly set the different dramatic soliloquies within the natural rhythm of a single day. However varied in form they are, the fact that all four play variations on the basic structure of a day indicates the degree to which Woolf's imagination flourished within the security of strict limitations. When she deserts those confines, as the difficulties of *Jacob's Room* and *The Years* reveal, her work loses considerably in power.

Woolf's feelings about *Mrs. Dalloway,* as expressed in her diary while she was still completing the novel in 1924— "if this book proves anything, it proves that I can only write along those lines [of *Jacob's Room*] and shall never desert them, but explore further and further and shall, heaven be

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praised, never bore myself an instant''—were prophetic about the course all of her fiction was to follow. The process of formal exploration, haltingly begun in *Jacob's Room,* continues until her death in 1941. It is an open-ended search, each new novel struggling with formal problems totally alien to everything preceding it. For too long it has been a critical commonplace to see *The Waves* as the teleological fulfillment of Woolf's genius. Such a view not only leaves critics hard pressed to explain what came after—*The Years* and *Between the Acts*—it seriously distorts the nature of what came before. For Woolf's novels do not follow a linear path, the discoveries of one leading to the production of the next, but rather consitute a series of discrete forays in altogether different directions into unknown territory. *The Waves* no more represents a culmination of her work than does *Orlando* or *To The Lighthouse.* Perhaps the most misguided enterprise on which she embarked was *The Years,* but even this was a failure of an experimental sort, not, as frequently thought, a renunciation of experiment. Moving from the sustained internality of *The Waves* to the strict ''externality'' of *The Years,* from the novel of vision to the novel of fact, was as daring an innovation for Woolf as was the extraordinary conception of *The Waves* itself. What matters in each novel is that Woolf was able to force herself ''to break every mould and find a fresh form of being, that is of expression, for everything I feel or think.'' Just as *The Waves* is an entirely different book from *Orlando,* published three years earlier, so with *The Years,* Woolf comments in her diary, ''I am breaking the mould made by *The Waves.*''

Common to all her novels is the attempt to create a texture for them of the sort Lily Briscoe seeks for her painting: ''Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wings; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses.'' The centrality of such a conception for Woolf is also suggested, in language strikingly similar to Lily's, by a 1925 diary entry. Musing on the greatness of Proust, Woolf praises him for qualities she unmistakably wanted to achieve in her own work: ''The thing about Proust is his combination of the utmost sensibility with the utmost tenacity. He searches out those butterfly shades to the last grain. He is as tough as catgut and as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom.''

The delicacy of her sensibility, of course, is granted her even by her most vehement detractors; indeed, it is frequently used as a reason for dismissing her as a serious artist, on the grounds that her exquisiteness (the epithet most generally attached to her) leads only to sterile exercises in preciosity. In fact, highly patterned and sensitive though the surface of her

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novels is, there is nothing exquisite in the least about her fiction. From the bewildered Mrs. Flanders, standing dumbly in Jacob's room after his death, holding out his shoes, to the curtain rising at the end of *Between the Acts* on the confrontation between Isa and Giles, her work deals with enduring human concerns without solace of illusion or sentimentality. Woolf looks unflinchingly at a work that offers very little in the way of easy gratification. Death and the anguish of isolation are the inescapable pressures felt in every book; it is always in the face of these that her characters attempt to fashion their precarious visions of order, and their fleeting successes never obscure our sense of the difficulty of the battle or the knowledge that the dangers remain. In affirming the possibility of order, she never falsifies the chaos threatening it. "Nothing was ever one thing," *To The Lighthouse* insists, and James's discovery as he nears the lighthouse that is not just the "silvery, misty-looking tower" that gleamed at him when he was a child, but also something stark, solid, and forbidding is precisely the kind of complex view Woolf holds to throughout her life.

Despite her tough-mindedness and complexity, it is still not clear that Woolf will ever quite luxuriate in the unquestioned eminence accorded a Conrad or a Joyce or a Faulkner. As long as the cult of Bloomsbury worship flourishes, of course, Woolf's reputation will continue to grow. But even Bloomsbury's mythic stature will one day erode and we will once again have to confront an enigmatic writer whose novels lack the narrative interest and overt social and psychological concerns of the other great twentieth-century writers. Such a confrontation will always be difficult for a large number of readers. Woolf's uncompromising effort to convey "the exact shapes my brain holds" is an enterprise whose basically subjective character has frequently been thought to ensure its ultimate insignificance. As I have tried to indicate, however, the explicitly personal nature of her attempt is neither precious nor self-indulgent. Developing out of Woolf's urgent need to get to the heart of the reality she felt was somehow available to her, the novels are at the same time informed by a strict artistic integrity which prevents them from degenerating into the narrowly private. In rendering that vision of reality, Woolf provides us with a rich variety of compelling shapes that speak in immediate ways to all of us. What Woolf needs is a criticism which, eschewing the temptations of the modish and the topical, will explore the different ways these potent shapes function. Only then will she have earned that satisfaction she briefly grants Miss La Trobe: "Hadn't she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony . . . for one moment . . . one moment."

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STORIES

Charles Newman

THE WOMAN WHO THOUGHT LIKE A MAN

"Then how should I revenge myself?"

Cymbeline

Corinne L. Huff had a cold. The air nozzle above her seat was locked full on, coursing a chill upon her forehead for the entire flight. The gentleman beside her had no more luck with it than the purser or the stewardess. "Nothing seems to work right any more," he said, "even in first class." Corinne could only shrug assent and sniffle.

She had waited a half an hour for her luggage as the men with their carry-ons streamed by her. The strap of her cosmetic case spread a dull pain along her collarbone. Gusts of sourceless wind through the half-completed terminal pimpled her legs. A college girl in jeans, breasts banging her sweatshirt about, strode by, her suitcase on roller-skates. The flourescent corridors are slippery with disinfectant. They shine but issue neither reflection nor shadow. A porter sits disconsolately on the edge of the conveyor belt, and lowers his gaze as Corinne catches him eyeing her. Not one to pull rank gratuitously, she walks over to make talk.

"You guys really working up a sweat today, huh?" His dark face became friendlier, puffier.

"No ma'am. Nobody got much baggage any more. They don't care for waitin' on it, carr'in' it, or packin' it."

"Well, I have my samples in mine," Corinne said curtly, handing him her stub. "The whole trip's wasted without them."

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"You better check with the desk then, ma'am. This here flight's all through," said the colored man.

Corinne patiently explained to the towheaded, heavily forearmed airline official that her samples were in the bag, and he brought out a chart with drawings of different types of bags.

"Which one does yours look like?"

"None of them."

"Not a one?"

"Not even close. It's custom made."

Then Corinne reached over, and plucking his pen from his shirt pocket, drew the official a picture. Then she pushed the pen back behind his ear. "You have a blue pen too, officer?" He shook his head. "Well, the bag's blue. Color it in when you have a chance. I've got a presentation first thing in the morning, so you better get it to the hotel before I hit the sack . . . and don't try to make up to me, kiddo. I know that custom blue bag is stacked up above this goddamn airport somewhere, and I want you to bring it in, sweet and low, like the young ensign that you are, just like you were bringing in a riddled fighter to your carrier in the Coral Sea."

"Look, ma'am. I'm no pilot."

"Well, be a hero once, anyway. It's good for the economy," and as Corinne disembarked for the cab rank, kicking her cosmetic case ahead of her across the marble floor, the official turned to his countermates in disbelief.

Outside in the terrible wind, Corinne pushed five dollars at the starter.

"Can't bust the rank, Miss, I gotta live with these guys every day."

The cabs continued to arrive desultorily in the slush. Twenty minutes later, three conventioneers ahead of Corinne piled into a Checker, the starter yelling, "Four to a cab," then lapsed into a mumble as he regarded her.

"That's quite all right," Corinne said sweetly if somewhat nasally, and grabbing the knee of one conventioneer, hauled herself onto a jump seat, her thick dark hair fanning out along the mesh which protected the driver.

The three conventioneers were wedged against one another like pickled vegetables, fedoras high on their foreheads, sweating even in

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the zero weather. Corinne's classic knees decorated either side of an enormous thigh of a paralyzed middleman who desperately tried to avoid her eyes. But then she giggled mercifully, and everyone relaxed.

The men all had on heavy college rings, wedding bands, and nameplates; Harold, Dick, and Fitz. Corinne had the same, except hers were a bit smaller. In fact, everybody on the entire plane seemed to have on rings and nameplates, from the Jewish rear stewardess, T. Rich, to the imperturbable Scandinavian Captain Anderson.

The men were talking a highly technical language, perhaps out of some long forgotten embarrassment. They were not your everyday salesmen, but some kind of engineers, probably petro-chemical or geo-morphological. Corinne winced out of the window. New Jersey appeared like a load of soiled, forgotten diapers. The men were elbowing each other, fighting for breathing room, the cabbie was talking about getting mugged, the windows were steaming up. Somebody said, "Well, what the hell do they expect me to do? Start over at forty-two?"

Then they were above the city on a spiral ramp, with the cabbie calling out for hotels; the Sheraton for Dick, the Hilton for Harold, and the St. Regis for Fitz, the latter of which they now approached. Fitz, who had crushed his legs into a corner for the entire trip to avoid touching Corinne, now tapped her on the knee with *U.S. News & World Report* and asked her if she were free for dinner. Freed from the anonymous bulk of his fellows, he appeared not at all badly put together.

About the only unattractive thing about Corinne Huff was her laugh, or rather the lack of one. Her jubilation had been so unabashed and full throated, and her school friends had teased her about it so severely, that she had taken to stopping it by opening her mouth so theatrically wide as to cut off the epiglottis, and it was this noiseless guffaw at his odd, officious approach, which now spent itself upon Fitz, furrowing his clear brow.

"Look," he stammered, "I didn't mean . . ."

Corinne didn't know whether she was ashamed of belittling his casualness or put off by his ultimate tentativeness; she had told herself recently and repeatedly that women's greatest foolishness was their over-concern about how they were treated initially and their circumspection at how they were treated eventually. She closed her mouth on this thought.

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"I'm sorry," she said, "but I've other plans."

"Of course. I just thought . . ."

"Why don't you give me your card, though? Perhaps I'll be free tomorrow."

Fitz said something into his lapels as he fumbled for his wallet. His face was quite red, and he handed his credentials over, and Corinne was relieved as the cab began to rev.

"Bye, Fitz."

He nodded rather too fast and hurriedly entered the St. Regis without overseeing his baggage.

"Hellew, Mrs. Huff," the Plaza's deskman greeted her. "Good to have you in the city again."

"I think I've got the flu, Jan," Corinne said as she signed in, putting "Buyer" under "Profession."

"There's a lot of it around, surely," Jan said, "but you look quite well all the same." She winked at him and smiled the bellboy into a trot.

Up in the suite, Corinne found that her bag had somehow preceded her, and the maid had already unpacked her swatches. They lay on the bed, a pointlessly organized melange of hue and texture, those samples of which she was to locate carloads.

"The sweet n' stupid is coming back into fashion," Corinne muttered and then fell backwards onto her products. This cold will do me in yet, was all she could think.

She was in the tub when Geoff rang. "Same old 427, honey. C'mon up. I'll leave the door ajar."

She slipped and very nearly killed herself getting back into the tub.

Geoff soon emerged from the mirrored door, a fifth of Dewar's White label in hand, and bending over from the waist, kissed the dark and massy islet rising from the water.

Geoff was a buyer for the same chain as Corinne, and they had met on a flight to Phoenix four years ago. They had become absolutely comfortable with one another. Corinne once told him that they fit as a mountain pine to a boulder, which Geoff liked, though he didn't know who was rock and who was tree. He carried her from the

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tub to the canopied bed and lay her down among her swatches, which like all innocent goods brought to the city, required nothing save their own multiplication. She had only breath to say, "Watch the swatches," and then the portrait of their avalanche was painstakingly painted. Pines and boulders, boulders and pines, end over end.

"Why are we so good together, Geoff? Just because we don't see each other much?"

"Because we've got nothing to prove, I guess."

"It's odd you should say that. It's just lately that I've wanted to prove something."

"With me?"

"Not exactly . . . with everybody," she said very softly.

Geoff seemed distracted. He sat on the edge of the bed, elbows on knees, rubbing his eyes. Then Corinne's knees were on the red spots his elbows had left, her arms wound about his head, nipping his nape. Geoff steadied himself on his palms, blowing her hair aside so he could see.

"You know," she said, from over his shoulder, "from the back you don't look more than twenty-one."

"It's a bad back, though. Inside, I mean. I have to sit down to urinate now."

"This is not a problem," Corinne said, but the phone rang sharply, and Corinne's hands went to her heart. Geoff dropped the receiver twice then handed it over to her.

"Mommy," it crackled.

"Oh Christ, Brucie, what's wrong!"

"When are you coming home, Mommy?"

"Tomorrow, honey, just like I told you."

"Well . . . uh," Corinne's husband Fred broke in. "Nothing's wrong here dear. We just wanted to call before bed. I didn't see the harm . . . "

"Of course. You're sure there's nothing . . . "

"Not a thing. How's your cold?"

"About the same, Fred."

"All right, Brucie?" Fred said.

There was no answer from the child, and Corinne's husband told her he'd meet the plane.

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Geoff was smoking a small cigar. "How's everything?"

"Fine. Just fine."

"Is what you're trying to prove have to do with him?"

"Not exactly."

"We've never talked about our families. I'll bet you have a nice family."

"Sure, Geoff. I'll bet you do too."

"So it's not the family then."

"Not exactly. Not mine anyway."

"I guess you don't want to talk. That's all right."

"Dammit," yelled Corinne, pounding her fists together, Geoff dropping ashes all over his chest, and then flailing madly at the sparks, "Dammit Geoff, don't you know what's happening with *women?*"

Geoff was looking around for an ashtray, both hands cupped with ashes. His chest was smeared with charcoal, his parts become very small. "You mean . . . women in general?"

"If you like. In America."

"You mean that they're more . . . aggressive . . . and everything?"

"Go on."

"No, I don't know much about it, I guess. It's a lot easier to get laid, of course."

"So *that's* how you think about it."

"Look, Corinne. Were you saving this number for me? I'm not your . . ."

"Because you are a sane, strong, and decent man, Geoff, who ought to know better. Who ought to know what's going on."

"Know what?" Geoff had absentmindedly slipped on his crimson acetate briefs.

"Don't you ever talk about this with your wife?"

"No, I mean, we're very open . . . but . . . anyway, what business is it of yours?"

"She doesn't tell you what it's like to be a woman?"

"She doesn't complain much, if that's what you mean."

"She has her life and you have yours. Is that what you mean?"

"This isn't like you, Corinne."

"I suppose I'm the exception that proves the rule."

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"Which rule?"

"Geoff, don't you believe there are some things that people can't express, but they can feel them happening all around them? That we're on the edge of things?"

"Personally or politically?"

"In between."

"I guess. So what's coming?"

"You're not going to like it."

"I'm not liking it right now much, Corinne."

"Well, put it this way. Why are you attracted to me?"

Geoff thought for a while, and as if it were a prerequisite for reflection, slipped on his cavalry twill slacks and angora socks.

"Well, Corinne, you're sure smart and pretty enough, but what I think I like best about you is that you're tough but don't have to show it all the time."

"*Very* disarming," she said desperately.

"Hey, let's go catch some dinner."

"I can't bear the thought of getting dressed again."

"OK, let's have some sent up."

"I'm not hungry, and that's it, Geoff, that's what's happening. Women are getting tougher and they're going to show it more."

Geoff paused. "I don't think that's what you meant to say."

Corinne lay back, and wrapping an ice cube from her drink in a washcloth, lay it on her sinuses.

"You know, Corinne, I just don't get it. If you just could say what you wanted you'd probably get it."

"How could you know what I want?"

"That's what I just said."

"Look, I just can't decide whether I want to throw off everything inessential or get more of everything. Can't you understand that?"

"Oh Corinne, that's just how a man feels."

Outside in the snow, teeth clenched all along fifty-eighth street, Corinne was dizzy.

"Go get some dinner, Geoff. I've got to beat this cold before tomorrow."

"You want me to come back tonight?"

"Suit yourself."

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"I will *not*," Geoff said with some dignity, "take the onus for this snafu!"

"You know, Geoff, you are beginning to smell like my husband."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Scotch."

Geoff thought for a minute as he half-knotted his tie.

"Well then," he said, "you smell like your husband too."

Then he left without another word, for some reason carrying his loafers on his two longest fingers like a part-time fisherman with two incredible champion trout.

Corinne woke to moans. She reached out to embrace Geoff but found only slick sheet. Then she thought she was dreaming, not awake in a dead city, that her difficult breathing had startled her, and that this was somehow indicative of her life, forever being shaken out of real release, prevented from dreaming by her own banal breathing. But slowly the inventory of the room took stock of her: the dirty Degas prints, stiff crinoline drapes, the dry whine of the radiator enforced themselves. The moans reached a crescendo. A woman's moans, and not three feet from her through the wall, that conventionally rhythmic cry, somewhere between ecstasy and pain, a wordlessness refined to the point where it could be taken in whatever way its interpreter wished, named by every man to suit his fashion. It was the first time Corinne had heard it from another, and she lay rigid, nearly comatose, waiting anxiously for the silences to come.

What happened after that can only be related by the numbers, very much as in Kindergarten where all experiences are supposed to be of the same duration and intensity, utterly undifferentiated. At any rate, Corinne found herself in her robe in the hall, standing before room 427, where moaning had given way to the low squabble of a late nite talk show. She was startled by a stunning black maid in a pinafore, at least six feet two with the face of a West Indian goddess, who strode peremptorily down the hall and disappeared through double swinging doors into the Help's respite room. Corinne watched the doors until they ceased shuffling against one another, and then she heard voices again, charmingly accented, then tearful, and finally,

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the sobbing. From behind every door, the voices of women whispering, sighing, weeping.

Back in her room, Corinne bolted the door, then unlocked it, realizing Geoff would misinterpret if he chose to return. Then she turned on the TV and spun the dial—news, weather, sports, Charlton Heston, moonshot reruns—snapped it off, then, her lungs crackling with dehydration, she tried to open the window. She got it up about an inch, and the fearful whine of fifty-eighth street entered with a few toxic snowflakes. She tried the other window which gave off to a gray airshaft, but it was nailed shut. Corinne then poured a water tumbler full of Geoff's scotch and traced with her finger the paisley pattern which flung itself from the drapes to the cornices and reappeared in the tassels of the bedspread. She tried the lyre-back chair at the writing desk; through the glass top, a card garlanded with puppies and rhododendrons announced: "We shall do our utmost to please you." Above the desk, she reached for a book but found that the spines of the leather editions had been sawn off and glued to a board. And then in the mirror she caught sight of her touseled bed, the swatches scattered about the pillows and the floor, exploded as artificially as in a store-window display, a buyer's market, and then she found herself fumbling in her purse for . . . Fitz's card. But when a cloudy voice in room 818 at the St. Regis answered, Corinne banged the receiver down and felt, for the first time in her thirty-two years, that she was perfectly capable of both inconsequence and betrayal.

It was close to midnight. Corinne Huff sat crosslegged in her chair, eyeing herself in the mirror in a way that she hadn't since she was sixteen. She began to slowly open her robe, then let it fall back. She touched her stomach, ran her hands over her crispness, as if it were a stranger's pet, and then lay back, strangely calm. She had not at all suddenly come to that irrefragably momentous American knowledge, contracted the nation's most recent humor. Corinne was "simply" fed up. She didn't want to go home. She didn't want to stay in New York and live it up. She didn't want to apologize to Geoff even though he perhaps deserved it. She didn't want to take the night flight to Acapulco, she didn't want to buy one more single thing, she didn't want to be anybody else, or with anybody else, and she didn't want to be alone. Corinne knew then that no person, group, idea, option, feeling, or law would ever solve the common

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problem of this slightly overheated, overdecorated room.

She put the night latch on the door, instructed the desk to cancel her next morning's appointments on account of illness, left a heavy tip for the maid who would have to somehow dispose of the swatches, and after a large dose of antihistamine and the last of Geoff's scotch, watched the room close about her, a foot at each blink.

On the plane again. We are patient only at incredible speeds. Corinne, pale, without makeup, hair tied severely back, on the aisle this time, the bulkhead seat facing the galley. Beyond, the controls. Each time the stewardess passes, her elbow brushes Corinne's hair, and with a couple of bloody marys under her belt, this is all right. Everybody on the flight is drunk. The cockpit door is open, the navigator is reclining and reading a comic, welded in the curve of his brown hands. The pilot and co-pilots' heads are bathed in the Carribean light of their incredible instrumentation. A tight-lipped woman emerges from the forward toilet. Her eyes are also red and wet. Garbage is mounting about them; discarded newspapers, cups and napkins, gutted macadamia nut sacks, Corinne's kleenex. The cold has gone to her chest. Why do they give you a menu when there's no choice, she thinks. Why do they build the shore so close to the sea? The man next to her is singing something to himself. When their elbows brush he jerks an unspoken, involuntary apology. Corinne has no more questions, so she watches the stews. In the toilet, they exchange their pumps for flats, their slacks for culottes, their jackets for blouses and apronettes. Their epaulettes and braid are piled in the corner with sanitary napkins and airsickness bags. They slam everything, even the tiniest doors in the galley. All the little doors and windows have made them crass. Girls without grace, but this is impossible between takeoff and landing, a good plane with no blood on it. The intercom has been found defective. The primary stew coils the microphone's impotence about her wrist, grinding her teeth. Another holds the yellow scrotum of an oxygen bag above her head, blowing on a tube, while yet another reads the prepared text as best she can without amplification. She knows no one can see her and no one listens to her, except perhaps one random inspector. To their everlasting credit, they are laughing at themselves. The eggs are

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under radar, the baby's milk is being boiled. Shit, they say. Another baby. The champagne has been broken out. And the clouds, the cirrus, are becoming themselves as we cannot.

Corinne has resolved to worry no more about herself and releases her chairback. But as she does so, strange and constant pressure exerts itself upon her kidneys. She glances over her shoulder and sees a little boy behind her, clutching his mother's wrist, his legs stiffened in fear against her chairback. The woman is about her age, but puffier and paler; nothing, clearly, but a mother. But then Corinne hears her own voice, if not exactly her choice of words, as well as that of Brucie and them all.

"Don't kick the seat. Didn't you see the lady turn around?"

"I'm scared, mama."

"Look. Here're the directions. It says sit straight up and fasten seat belts. Are we doing it right? Fine."

"Wouldn't he like some breakfast?" a stew leans over, "or maybe even a hot dog?"

"I want to go down," the child whines and squirms.

"Sit back and shut up!"

"The engines went off. We stopped," he says, without a quaver.

"That always happens when we're through climbing," the stew says. "Don't you watch television?"

"I always thought that too when I first flew," the mother said.

"I can't see the lights any more," the boy says.

"Look out the window," says the stew. "See, we're not stopped."

"Do what the nice lady says, and wave to Daddy and Aunt Ella and Chipper."

Corinne felt the child's feet relax just for an instant but then thrust forward with redoubled force.

"There's a hole in the wing!" he yelled.

"Those are just flaps, honey," the stew said. "We're leveling off now."

"He got *that* from television," Mother says.

"Hello Aunt Ella!"

"Don't yell, child. Aunt Ella can't hear you. She's deaf."

"Daddy?"

"You promised your daddy you'd be good. Now read the instructions again. Out loud this time. Come on, how about a hot dog, honey?"

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The other stews were passing up and down the aisle, absorbing the leers and fears, relating the captain's anticipation of turbulence. "Please stay seated," they were saying. Corinne saw it was getting darker. They were going faster than the sun. It wasn't good enough.

"We're going down now, mama."

"Yes, dear, we're going down."

"Where to?"

"When we get home, we'll go to the filling station and get some steaks."

"I don't want to go down."

"You can't fly all day. You can't fly any more than to home."

"But I don't want to go down."

"You didn't want to go *up* before. Maybe you'll grow up to be an astronaut."

"Are we down now, mama?"

"Not yet." The stew passed a hot dog to the kid.

"Oh, now you've got mustard all over. Wipe it off."

"No."

"Shut up or I'll leave you here . . . you want to be left here?"

"No."

"You want to take the bus home all by yourself?"

"Will Daddy be there?"

"We just said goodbye to daddy. He's in Newark. Be a big boy. Be a man now. Or you'll have to find your own way home."

Corinne lay back. There wasn't much she would have added to that bit. What man had ever forgotten it? It wasn't the sort of thing one could be intelligent about. Well, there was something nice about flying, really, about the futility of giving contrary directions at such a height, etc., where fear and toughness were all of a piece. Not at all like coming back from a party with Fred, grinding your teeth in the swerving car, wearing out an imaginary brake pedal with a toeless pump from the death seat. The trees which line the road in Fred's wandering lights are the same color as our fuselage . . .

The child was stamping now. And the man beside her had evidently succeeded in singing himself to sleep, for he was slouched heavily on her shoulder, an enormous two-tone brogue like a fallen plinth against her calf.

She was just about to request a change in seating when the cock-

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pit door opened and the Captain emerged. He was exceptionally handsome in a stereotyped way, tanned with silvered temples and golden eyes. The Captain touched the bill of his cap over a half-supine Corinne, but did not look down.

"We have an announcement. There will be increasing turbulence the rest of the way. Please keep your belts on. Also, we're stacked up in an indefinite holding pattern. But if you look out the window," he finished, "you can see the lights of Akron."

Then as the plane suddenly broke its plane, the Captain smiled self-consciously and braced himself against Corinne's seatback. His manicured nails were an inch from her mouth. The child's feet were relentless at her hams. The gentleman to her left had begun to snore. The Captain's hand was ringless, whorled with golden hair and large veins. Large light-blue veins. Also, a raised scar, like Akron from the air, another ganglia of strangulated energy. Like what lay in her lap. Like what kicked her back. Like what drove the plane. Like what lit the clouds. Though not enough alike.

The Captain thought the lady was about to scream or vomit. But it was only Corinne's suppressed laughter again. Pretty lips drawn up from pretty teeth, offense she was taught not to commit, defense against the tears she would not permit.

"Too many," she was thinking, "just too many damn people to love."

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George Hodos

SQUASHED BY THE PARTY, LIKE A VERMIN

I had been expecting them, more or less, when they came for me at one in the morning on July 6th, 1949. For weeks my friends had been disappearing, one by one, until the entire "Swiss Group" had been involved. It would have been a disgrace, I felt, had they left me out.

When they finally rang the bell at the front door, I felt relief, my tension subsided, at long last I would find out what was going on. Perhaps, I thought, I could help to clear up the misunderstanding that was obviously taking place. I experienced no fear; good Communists need not fear the AVH, our State Security Office, the hard fist of the People's Democracy of Hungary which moved only against reactionaries.

Neither did any fear develop in me when I sat for hours that night, alone, facing a wall in a small room in the Andrássy Street headquarters of the AVH in Budapest. Finally at dawn, a uniformed comrade came into the room; he told me to get up, keep my filthy mouth shut and place my hands behind my back. He marched me into another room where I was placed up against another wall and left standing.

If anything I was puzzled. A mere routine, certainly, but can't our police distinguish between communists and fascists?

At noon they finally began to take notice of me. I was fingerprinted, photographed, made to empty my pockets, take off my tie and remove my shoe laces. Then I was led through an endless maze of stairs and corridors, devoid of people, down into the basement of the building. Even when the door was locked behind me and I looked around my cell, its moist stone walls lit by a lonesome bulb, a bare wooden cot, high above a tiny opening, leading only to darkness, still I felt no fear. Soon, I knew, everything would be cleared up, apologies extended and I would be allowed to go home. I lay down on the cot, closed my eyes and fell asleep.

I was awakened in the middle of the night and taken to an interrogation room. The Comrade Lieutenant who sat there in civilian clothes explained that I had not been brought to him as a witness but as a criminal.

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There was, he said, no need for information, they already knew all about me and my gang, what they expected was a full confession. I was to write an unsparing, self-critical report of my activities. If I did this, exposing my role and that of my accomplices, then the Party would show leniency and perhaps even forgive me.

I asked him what role he was talking about. He replied brusquely that it was the AVH that was asking the questions now and that it was my duty to supply honest answers. Then he left me to myself.

There followed a never-ending 48 hours. When I completed a report on my activities, I was given questions about friends of mine to answer in writing. Then my report was returned to me with annotations about which parts were to be elaborated upon in even the most minute details. Again I was asked specific questions and demands were made for more details.

Finally my Lieutenant appeared again, freshly shaven and well rested. He called me a hardened criminal and told me that I should understand that the Party did not expect fairy tales from me but rather an unsparing confession of guilt and the unmasking of my accomplices.

With this everything began again: the report, written questions about friends and strangers, also about long forgotten details I had omitted. These last gave me the impression that they actually knew everything about my life and believed that I was trying to hide something from them. Then again, the report returned to me, more questions, more answers, more details.

At first, during this long ordeal, I was assailed by hunger, but as the night fell, I forgot that I had not had anything to eat or to drink for 48 hours; all I wanted was an opportunity to sleep. But as soon as I began to nod, a guard would come along and shake me awake. And so it went for two days and two nights: questions, the report, new answers, new demands, new details. I wanted to cooperate, to clear up misunderstandings, to pitilessly unmask myself and my friends since this was what the Party demanded of me. But what was there to unmask?

When finally the nightmare ended and I was led back to my cell, I could not even touch the cold beans in the tin bowl that was placed just outside the cell door.

For the next three days, nothing happened. I slept a great deal, wakened only in the morning when a guard would lead me to a doorless toilet and washbasin, and then place a tin bowl with lukewarm coffee in my cell. Later—it must have been in the evening—he would return with another bowl—this filled with sticky beans.

I waited for the moment when they would appear before the door and tell me that everything had been a mistake: go home, comrade, we're sorry that we doubted, even for a moment, your loyalty to the Party.

* * *

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The "Swiss Group" to which I had belonged consisted of Hungarian students who had been trapped in Switzerland at the beginning of the Second World War while at the universities of Zurich and Geneva. There were perhaps a dozen of us, young, idealistic, the children of good bourgeois families. The black and white world was very clear and transparent to us, thanks to the Marxist theory we had absorbed. We were absolutely certain that after Hitler's downfall the paradise of a classless, Socialist society would rise on the ruins of fascist Hungary and we were happy that we were part of this struggle in the secure haven of free, neutral Switzerland.

It was probably the most unworldly group in the entire international communist movement in exile. With the exception of our leader, Dr. Tibor Szönyi, a psychiatrist and a veteran communist, hardly any of us had ever seen, face-to-face, a member of the proletariat to whose interests we were dedicating ourselves. To us Stalin was the kindly father, kissing children and patting heads, the personification of humanism, the guarantor of a just future for the whole of mankind.

With the outbreak of the war, we began to organize the Hungarians residing in Switzerland, informed them about conditions in what was now our German occupied homeland. We waited for the great day when, as the warriors of the Party, we could return to Hungary and build Socialism, ready and willing to sacrifice our own lives in the cause. We did not know that that was exactly what the Party would demand of us within a few short years.

The arrests of the "Swiss Group" began shortly after the conclusion of what the Party called the "Year of Change." In 1948 the Hungarian communists destroyed the peasant and bourgeois parties and organizations, throwing their leaders into prison or driving them into exile. Finally they even took on the Social Democrats; there was no opposition left in Hungary.

I did not mourn them, one cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, as the cliché has it, and the eggshells, the landowners, the clergy, the opposition leaders who were compromised and corrupted by their alliances with Horthy, the Hungarian fascist leader and with Hitler, belonged, I well knew, on the dung heap of an evil past.

The Soviet communists announced in Moscow that their party had been infiltrated by Trotskyite spies, traitors and saboteurs. Consequently it would seem reasonable that the same had happened in the parties of Eastern Europe. Ten years after securing his personal leadership in the Soviet Union by his purges in the '30s, Stalin started to search for enemies within the parties of the satellite countries in order to cement his hold there.

Thus Traicho Kostov, Secretary of the Central Committee, was hanged in Bulgaria because he did not comprehend the necessity that his country be exploited by the Soviet Union in the name of socialism. Tito of Yugoslavia,

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when his turn came, foiled the Soviets by seceding and establishing his independence—even Stalin could not hang a whole people united behind their leader. Koci Xoxe, the almighty Communist boss in Albania, was not so fortunate; he was sent to the gallows so that his country would not follow the Yugoslav example.

And now it came time for Stalin to act to prevent an even larger disaster than had befallen him in Belgrade and to set a grandiose example and liquidate all potential Titos in his empire. Preparations began for the trial of Laszlo Rajk in Budapest.

There were certain preliminaries that had to be gone through first. The potential list of the accused had to be selected. It consisted of two main categories. First of all, Hungarian communists who had returned home from exile in Western Europe or America after the world war ended; many of them had fought in Spain against Franco and had remained in the West fighting in resistance movements against Hitler. A second target consisted of the partisans, leaders of the clandestine Communist party in prewar Hungary who fought in the country against the Nazis.

All of these groups had one thing in common. They had not been trained in Moscow and were not sent to Hungary by the Soviet secret police, the M.V.D. In the twisted minds of the Soviet rulers, they were "potential enemies," the first group because it had been exposed to "bourgeois influence" during their exile in the West, the second one because of its popularity; they did not only risk their lives for a cause, but dared to do it without any help and advice from far-away Moscow. Both categories contained idealistic, independent-minded people, therefore "potentially dangerous" —not would-be, but could-be Titos.

At the same time a plausible story had to be concocted, at least for internal consumption. On this, Stalin and Beria, his police chief, remained rather vague but their general guidelines became clear: a conspiracy hatched by Tito and the intelligence forces of the West in order to topple the Socialist states.

The concrete details of this "plot" were worked out on a day-to-day basis and the cooperation between the two communist governments succeeded brilliantly. Stalin supplied the grand concept and his star pupil Mátyás Rákosi, General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, worked out the details, the local color, as well as the cast of characters headed by Rajk and Szönyi. They were well chosen for the role, Rajk, the Minister of the Interior, second most powerful man in Hungary, Spanish freedom fighter, "partisan," and Szönyi, member of the Central Committee, intellectual, Jew, and recently returned home from his exile in Switzerland.

The Soviet Secret Police Chief for Southeast Europe, Colonel Fyodor

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Byelkin arrived in Budapest to work with Gábor Péter, the AVH chief, on making the practical preparations for the purge and to train the Hungarian police in the latest psychological and physical methods of extorting confessions. Then, on the night of May 17, 1949, the avalanche began to roll. Tibor Szönyi was arrested, followed soon by Rajk. Six weeks later it was my turn.

* * *

The next few months were so unreal that often, in the loneliness of my cell, I dug my fingernails into my wounded flesh to make sure that I was not going through an evil, crazy dream. My "report," in its various versions, was "repoliticized," as my interrogators called the distortions, and turned into a particle of mosaic which fitted into their imaginary total picture of the activities of a band of spies and conspirators.

The role assigned to me in this conspiracy was actually quite irrelevant and could have been constructed in an entirely different way to serve other purposes. Essentially I was brought into the story as an American spy in a devilish scheme of Allen Dulles, head of the top secret Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) in Berne. According to the plot, Dulles and his "master spy," Noel Field, head of an American relief organization helping anti-Fascist refugees, instructed Szönyi, in Switzerland, to recruit a gang of imperialist agents, of which I was a member, whose mission it would be to return after the war to Hungary, infiltrate the Communist Party, and coordinate espionage activities with those of the Titoist conspiracy of Rajk.

It took them seven months to get me to admit the truth of this "story" and to sign a confession. Their methods were actually quite primitive, if, in the end, successful. All of my friends, they explained, were spies, Trotskyites, saboteurs—they even read me their confessions—so how could I alone among them remain guiltless? I was but a speck in all of this, a journalist, foreign correspondent for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and the *Neues Österreich*, a contributor to the *Agence France Presse*. Didn't I know that all foreign editors with whom I was in contact were agents of the American intelligence who passed all my reports on to the O.S.S., and that, in actual fact, my articles were espionage reports inspired by Szönyi and his accomplice, the Chief of the Press Office, Endre Rosta?

I was unconvinced and stubborn and so I was turned over to the Bad Men. They wore uniforms and tried to teach me the truth by resort to familiar devices, rubber truncheons, kicks, slaps, and gymnastic exercises.

They were followed by the Good Men, in civilian clothes, who used as their means of persuasion, cigarettes, friendly conversation about the World Youth Festival and soccer scores. Their line of attack was, "You are an

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intelligent man, you want to be a good comrade, the Party requires you to make this confession, you understand the reasons for it."

But when I did not understand the Bad Men reappeared and the cycle began all over again. Rubber truncheons, gymnastic exercises, we don't need your confession, no one will ever find out about you, you are nothing but vermin whom the Party will squash. This was followed by long weeks in the damp, cold basement cell with no blanket, my clothes in rags, the soles of my shoes worn off, with stinking black mold covering my beaten, swollen feet. I was allowed to sleep only on my back; when I shifted position a guard would scream at me until I woke.

Endless weeks passed in the eternal light of that basement catacomb and I knew at last that I was buried alive and that there would be no return for me. Then finally, I was taken out of my cell and into a room and there a Good Man said to me, in feigned astonishment, "What? You have no blanket? But surely it must be very cold down there, I will get you one immediately, and, if you want them, some books as well." I barely had time to let this sink in when he continued. "Don't you think it is about time to cooperate with us and help unmask the enemies of the Party? You know the dialectics, that well intentioned deeds, under certain conditions, can turn into the opposite. You must have confidence in the Party, it can tell the difference between those who were deliberate enemies and those who were their victims."

Suddenly it became clear to me that the Party knows at last: I had been a victim, misled by the enemies of the Party. I could trust the AVH because it wanted only the truth from me. And I began to write, there in the sunlit office sitting across from the Good Man.

I wrote that I had not been sufficiently vigilant in understanding the class enemy, that in my bourgeois blindness I had not recognized Trotskyites and spies who took advantage of my political immaturity, but that in my case their plan had failed because the AVH had unmasked the conspirators just in time, before any harm could be done. I was very proud of my unsparing self-criticism, convinced as I wrote, that while Szönyi was a Trotskyite spy, my other friends from the Swiss Group were victims like myself, guilty of walking guilelessly into the diabolical net spread by the agents of the imperialist intelligence services.

I handed my papers to the Good Man. He read them carefully and then said, "You are the most stubborn Trotskyite I have ever met. You have just signed your own death sentence."

However, I know it now and they knew it immediately, that was the moment at which they broke me—I felt guilty, for the first time since my arrest. I believed them that there was a crime committed against the Party

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and that I had participated in it, by not being "vigilant" enough. In the unreal underworld of the communist secret police headquarters there was only a small step from "subjective guilt" to "objective crime." You trusted spies, though you did not know that they were spies? Don't be such a ridiculously apolitical bourgeois: you helped the enemies of the Party, so you are an enemy.

They must have known it, that from here on it needs only a little kind comradely push to entrap me into their sick "logic." X is a spy, because we say so. What is a careless person who helps a spy? A tool of a spy, a spy himself, isn't he? You can sign it with good conscience, we know both sides of the truth. Now the Party needs only the one side, but we won't forget the other.

I had crossed their line. They could now send their Bad Men to others, to teach them how to feel guilty.

A few days later I was moved from the cellar cell in Andrássy Street to the prison on Markó Street. Here there was a window to the sky, doves settled on the roof of the gray Court Building across the prison. My food improved, I received five cigarettes every day and even books. Best of all, I was not alone anymore, I had several cell mates.

Colonel Géza Vietoris was a District Chief of Police. Before the war he had been a printer in contact with the illegal communist organization. In 1945 he was one of the founders of the communist political police until Gábor Péter arrived from Moscow and took over control of the apparatus. His was one of the few instances in the entire Rajk affair in which personal reasons played a role in the arrest; Péter simply could not stand him. When they arrested him two of his teeth were knocked out before he even left his house and the beatings continued in the police station.

With his body torn and bleeding, he signed a confession that he was a police informer and a go-between for Rajk and Horthy's fascist police. Then he was offered a cigarette; when he finished it, he retracted his confession. The cycle was repeated twice, torture, confession, retraction. Finally he was brought to Markó Street.

Six years later I learned that the AVH never did dare to call him as a witness against Rajk for fear of a public retraction. He was imprisoned without trial and finally freed in 1954, when Rajk and the other murdered victims were posthumously rehabilitated and the survivors released from prison.

János Reisman, one of Hungary's finest photographers, was my second cellmate. He lived in Berlin until Hitler came to power and then emigrated to the Soviet Union where he had the incredibly good luck not to be purged in the trials of the 1930s. In 1939 he was forced to leave Russia and spent the war years in Paris working with the Resistance.

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After the war he returned to Hungary where he was given a post in the Cultural Division of the Embassy in Paris. An urgent telegram called him home and when he arrived at the railway station in Budapest he was arrested by the AVH.

After the first blows he gave up—he asked for a glass of cognac and when, to his greatest surprise, he got it, he began to spin a fantastic tale centering around his recruitment by the American Intelligence Service. It was a poetic masterpiece of a confession, worthy of his artistic nature. When he described it to me, trembling, he said that since he was convinced we were going to be hanged no matter what we did, he had concocted a statement of such nonsense that hopefully some day, someone reading it would understand the absurdity of the whole proceeding.

We met again later in the prison of Vác, after the secret trial of the "French Group." He had been sentenced to life imprisonment.

In February, 1950 I was returned to Andrássy Street. This time the interrogator was someone I knew, a Lieutenant Ervin Faludi whom I had met several times socially. The notes I had written, he told me, were useless, I could not be sentenced on the basis of such ridiculous self criticism. The preparations for the trial of the "Swiss Group" were complete, only my statement was missing. If I did not sign a confession, he said, thirteen witnesses would be paraded in front of me and I would never leave the prison alive.

But, he continued, he knew me as an intelligent man, a good comrade. He and I would write the confession together and I would receive a short prison sentence, three years; he could assure me of that even before the trial.

For the first six weeks I would live in a villa; my wife could visit me, and then when the entire affair had been forgotten, I would work under an assumed name for one of the provincial newspapers until it would be possible to return to Budapest. By now, he pointed out with great reasonableness, I should realize that it was not me that the Party was concerned about. After all, Rajk and Szönyi had already been hanged and the "Swiss Group" was now a part of the history of the international labor movement. It was just my bad luck that I had been a member of the group so the Party had no choice but to treat me as a friend or as an enemy, depending on my attitude.

I had become a particle of dust to be trod into the ground by the Party at any time, with no one to notice. I had been in the nether world from which there is no escape—but now everything would be cleared up. The Party knows everything. Six weeks in a villa and it is forgotten—a particle of dust whom the Party can once again turn into a human being.

I signed.

The statement was five pages long. It described how Szönyi had re-

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cruited me in Switzerland for the American intelligence services and how, following his instructions, I made contact in Hungary with such imperialist spies as O. Matter, economic editor of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, listed as an agent of the O.S.S., Jacques Clergier of *Agence France Presse,* an agent of the Deuxieme Bureau, Peter Smolka, foreign affairs editor of the *Neues Österreich* and Michael Burn, Budapest correspondent of the *London Times,* both agents of the British Intelligence Service, who under the guise of foreign reporting, smuggled out my spy reports on the political and economic situations in Hungary and passed them on to the Americans.

I remained in the cellar for a few more days, this time however supplied with blanket, cigarettes and books, until I was finally brought to the huge and elegant office of Colonel Mátyás Károlyi of the AVH. He pushed a typewritten document towards me.

"Here is the text of your indictment, the questions you will be asked by the president of the People's Court, and your answers. Memorize them word for word, so that there will be no slip-up during the trial. In three days I will call you again and we will have a dress rehearsal."

I told him he could depend on me, provided that both he and the Party were aware that not a single word in the indictment was consistent with the truth. Károlyi laughed. "The Party knows everything, the trial is just a circus, a formality and soon you will return to your family."

I was returned to Markó Street. Suddenly the food was excellent, even dessert was not missing, cigarettes as plentiful as I wanted, books as soon as I asked for them. I was visited by a physician who asked if I had any complaints and Lieutenant Faludi showed his concern by inquiring as to whether or not I had any wishes.

After two weeks of pampering, they walked into my cell one morning, took my measurements and returned an hour later with fresh underwear, a white shirt and a dark suit. Dress quickly, was the instruction, they will call for you in ten minutes. It was March 16, 1950. The "Swiss Group" once again reassembled and smiled sadly at each other in the prison corridor.

In the waiting room of the trial hall, things were cozy. The AVH officer offered us Espresso, cake and cigarettes. Faludi pulled me aside and promised to introduce me to my defense counsel. Don't tell him a word about your case, I was cautioned, if he asks you about any extenuating circumstances, mention your little daughter, a poor fatherless child always makes a good impression. But I was curious and asked my "defender" if he had read the indictment. "Not yet," he replied. "I have only just now been given it."

We were together again, the "Swiss Group," at the end of our dreams in Zurich and Geneva. One after the other we were called into the trial hall.

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Five or six AVH officers sat as "audience," behind us stood AVH guards, on the platform sat the Attorney General, Gyula Alapy, the members of the People's Court headed by Vilmos Olti, and the court-appointed defense counsel.

Everything went smoothly, no witnesses were called, the accused read their memorized texts against themselves and each other. During a break Faludi approached me again with a big friendly smile all over his fat face. The AVH, he said, is very satisfied but there is some unpleasant news, my sentence would not be three years but eight years, however, the whole thing is just a formality and I should appeal and the sentence would be reduced. (I did, and it was increased to ten years.) "A mere formality, as I told you. . . ."

Then came the pronouncement of sentences. For Ferenc Vági, death by hanging, life sentences for András Kálmán, Iván Földi and György Demeter, fifteen years for Gyula Kuti and Janos Dobó, ten years for Tamás Ács, Peter Balabán and György Somló, eight years for Endre Rosta, György Aczél and György Hódos, six years for Antonia Dobó-Drittenbass and five years for Rosa Demeter.

On the way out of the trial I whispered to Vági, "Don't take it seriously, it's just a show." He looked at me and shook his head: "We are objects of history." In the Vác prison I watched a light burn in his cell for four weeks, night and day. One night it went dark; the sentence had been carried out.

* * *

I was but a small "object" among some 250 "Rajkists," and the AVH had plenty of time at its disposal to play with me and others of my kind. It had been quite different with the major "criminals" who were supposed to confess their sins at a public trial within three or four months after their arrest. They were turned, with beatings and torture, into monsters in a very short time. With Szönyi it took just one week. A few days after his arrest he was seen by a friend of mine, barely recognizable, his head shrunk to an ash-gray, wrinkled skull. A week later, someone else told me he had regained some of his human features. Gábor Péter had assured him that he would be allowed to continue working as a doctor under an assumed name; but to make certain that he collaborated, his wife, six months pregnant, was arrested and he was given the choice of confessing or of watching her torture. He confessed.

It was said that he was the only one to scream when taken to the gallows —"I was betrayed, I was forced to confess with promises!"

Rajk died silently. Unbroken by weeks of torture, even by the arrest of

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his wife, Julia, he refused to confess. Only when János Kádár, then Minister of the Interior, came to his cell and assured him in the name of the Politbureau that the Party had no doubts about his innocence, did he give in. Kádár not only promised him his life, but a new existence in the Crimea if he made a "moral sacrifice" and assisted in Tito's unmasking. (Kádár's conversation with Rajk was tape recorded and seven years later, in 1956, during the show-down session of the Party Central Committee that preceded the Hungarian revolution of that year, Rákosi played the tape to shift part of the responsibility for the execution of Rajk to his opponent, Kádár.)

Nőt all died on the gallows. Dr. András Kálmán was a Spanish Civil War fighter and "Swiss," all at the same time. He was kind and gentle, one of the most humane Communists, obsessed by the idea of a better world. His torturers and the psychopathic operators of the MVD and the AVH had an easy time with such "sentimental idealists," a responsive object to be marched up against Szönyi and later to be sentenced to life imprisonment.

When, in 1952, Stalin prepared the "Doctor's Trial," Beria conceived of a new role for Kálmán. Russian doctors wanted to poison Stalin, according to the script, so it was logical that the scenario be repeated in the satellite countries. Kálmán was called on to "unmask" this plan of Jewish Communist doctors to plot Rákosi's assassination, he was to assume the role of a link between the Doctor's Trial, whose preparation was in progress, and the Rajk conspiracy. But this time the psychologists failed, Kálmán hanged himself in his cell.

The fourth victim of our group was Toni Drittenbass, the wife of János Dobó, a Swiss national who followed her husband to Hungary and into the prisoner's dock. She was a diabetic and did not get her insulin in prison. She was murdered, even though the hangman did not put the rope around her neck.

There were also chance victims among the "objects." Ibolya Molnár was a totally unpolitical young girl living in Switzerland when she fell in love with the German Communist emigrant, Bernhard Steinberger. They married and returned after the war to the Eastern Zone of Germany. In May, 1949, she visited her parents in Hungary and before returning to her husband, spent her last night at the home of the Kálmán family. That was the night of his arrest and the AVH took her along as well.

She was totally confused, not a responsive object for a political role, so she was interned without trial. Her husband was arrested in Leipzig and carried off to the Soviet Union. After the posthumous rehabilitation of Kálmán and those who survived the Rajk affair, both were discharged, Mrs. Steinberger from the concentration camp of Kistarcsa and her husband from a camp in Siberia.

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The poet Endre Havas also failed as a useful object. He had fought in the French resistance movement and the Hungarian People's Republic, in gratitude, appointed him cultural attaché in its Paris embassy. He was recalled to Budapest in 1949, arrested and tortured until he lost his mind. They locked him up without trial, in the cell next to mine in Vác prison. Day after day I heard the guards making fun of him; they howled with laughter when he was taken to his weekly shower and screamed: "Comrade Stalin, help deliver me from the hands of the Fascists!" Whenever they found his cell dirty they kicked him. One day they gave him one kick too many and he died on the floor.

It is probable that Miklós Szücs suffered the same fate. He had originally been slated for trial with the "English group" because he spent his war time exile in London. After the German defeat he became London correspondent for the Hungarian Communist Party daily, "Szabad Nép." His arrest caused a sensation because his brother, Ernö, was the number two man in the AVH, after Gábor Péter.

He was treated most gingerly and the "English group" had long since been disposed of when his turn came. He was used to unmask his brother as an imperialist agent. Miklós died from beatings given him by his brother's colleagues, and Ernö put a bullet through his head. (Why the all-powerful Lieutenant-Colonel fell into disgrace is not known. Perhaps he knew too much; he had been in charge of the most important of the accused in the Rajk trial, from the period of their torture and the giving of false promises to them, to their eventual hanging.)

It is still not known how many communists were murdered in connection with the Rajk affair. I know of at least eighteen and there must have been many more. They all died innocent, faithful to the Party and to Moscow. Szönyi's deputy, András Szalai, whom the Horthy police had once almost beaten to death, was to die at the hands of the communists as a police informer; Endre Szebenyi and Colonel Endre Villányi, both "partisans," were hanged because, as non-Muscovites, they had occupied leading positions in the police department and the economic police. The same applied to Major General Béla Korondy, one of the few Hungarian resistance fighters in the army of Horthy, who was accused of fomenting a military revolt; Police Colonel László Marschall, who had fought in Spain and in the French Resistance movement and who was hanged as an imperialist spy. In the interrogation prison in Markó Street I was still eating out of a tin plate on which he had scratched the words, "Long live the Party."

With the exception of Rajk and some of the high ranking military, all the murdered and jailed were Jews—in the big public trial the prosecution made a careful point to stress their former Jewish names. The ratio was even

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more pronounced in the secret branch trials, our Swiss group had not one gentile member.

But the picture was very similar on the other side of the fence; the overwhelming majority of the AVH officers were Jewish, from Gábor Péter on the top down to the little interrogators; only the manual jobs, physical torture as well as the routine jail duties, were performed by gentiles, mostly of peasant origin.

In spite of this even distribution, the anti-Semitic undercurrent of the purge was already clearly distinguishable, it would culminate four to five years later, after the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia, in the arrest of communists with a Zionist past and the preparations for a "Jewish doctors' plot," thwarted only in the last minute by the death of Stalin.

* * *

It is simpler to relate the events of the four and one-half years following the trial. It was not a villa to which we were transported from the Trial Hall, but the prison of Vác, near the border with Czechoslovakia. Later we were taken to the former Assembly Prison in Budapest. Both prisons were run by the AVH and reserved for political prisoners.

We were beaten when we spoke with a cell neighbor, when a pencil stub or a piece of paper was found on us, when we did not produce our work norms in the button factory.

They kept us for weeks in isolation cells, forced us to exercise in the prison corridor until we collapsed, and when we were fettered on hands and feet the guards would put out their cigarettes in our ears. The worst part was the complete isolation from the outside; we were not permitted to write or to receive letters, to say nothing of visitors. My wife had no word from me, no indication of whether I was alive or dead, for four years. I had become a speck of dust, squashed by the Party.

We survived these years in large measure because we were together. It did not take long before we realized that none of us had committed even the slightest offense against the Party or the state. It was a small step to the realization that the criminals were not those in the prisons but those in the Kremlin and in the offices of the AVH. The AVH interrogators had not lied to us, with such knowledge as we possessed, the length of our sentences was a mere formality; we could not hope to leave this nether world alive.

Our rescue came from a totally unexpected direction. Stalin, who had made us disappear, enabled us to return by his own death. Khrushchev needed a counter Rajk trial for his own purposes in the struggle against Beria and so he "unmasked" Beria and his accomplices as "agents of the imperialistic intelligence services."

For Stalin, Hungary had been, in 1949, the scene of the first big scale

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communist purge in his new postwar empire. For his successor, Khrushchev, Hungary served as the first colony to start a "de-Stalinization": The Rajk trial had to be reversed. Beria's execution was in reality a bullet in the dead Stalin's head; in 1955, with the firing of his Hungarian counterpart, Gábor Péter, Khrushchev prepared the downfall of Mátyás Rákosi and through him the old Stalinist guard in Eastern Europe.

We, the survivors of the purge, became once again the "objects of history." The show trial was reeled backwards, and we were found innocent.

The rehabilitation of those who remained alive, as well as those who had died, was as much a lie as had been our arrest. "A regrettable error, Comrades, the personality cult, Beria and Gábor Péter were responsible, not the system."

István Lehota, promoted from chief guard and torturer in the catacombs in Andrássy Street to his new position as prison director, waited to shake my hand when, on September 1, 1954, he opened the prison gate to let me go free.

* * *

The dream of the "Realm of Freedom" which we had cherished in Switzerland, had a short life in Hungary; four years after the liberation it fell victim to the Rajk trial. This was an historic turn of events for many reasons. It marked the start of the ruthless repression of any independent, critical stirrings in the Communist Party, of any hope that the failed, first Socialist model, the USSR, might not be the only possible one.

At the same time, however, the trials planted into the seven years of the Rákosi era which followed them the seeds of its own destruction; the rehabilitation, actual and posthumous, in 1955, of the victims of the trials initiated the process of fermentation which culminated in the uprising of October, 1956. On October 6, seventeen days before the outbreak of the revolution, three hundred thousand people gathered at a mass meeting at the gravesides of Rajk, Szönyi and their murdered friends, defying the Party and the political police and made a solemn vow to end all distortions, deceits and lies. What began as the funerals of Rákosi's victims ended as the funerals of their henchmen.

The October revolution of 1956 was still another dream that could not come true. Not only because of the Russian tanks that crushed it, but also because of the Rajk affair. The show trial and its aftermath of terror became the "childhood trauma" of a whole generation, of all the dreamers about a sane, just society, even of the surviving former purge victims trapped in Hungary. It broke their back. Its memory buried their hopes, it "repoliticized" them into the docile bureaucrats who today administer the country.

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GOING TO THE MOVIES

Jonathan Baumbach

THE 14TH NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL

New films by François Truffaut *(Small Change)* and Eric Rohmer *(The Marquise of O . . .)* circumscribe the present Festival at Lincoln Center and set the tone. It is a solid Festival, more respectable than in its best years, with few surprises and no large disappointments. Among the highlights are the Truffaut and the Rohmer, the retrospective showings of Renoir's *Nana* (1926) and Visconti's *Obssessione* (1942), and new films by Rivette, Kurosawa, Fassbinder, Borowczyk and Marcel Ophuls. The West Germans seem to me over-represented and the Americans, apart from the short subjects (and how banal most of those are), given meager occasion. The following are some of my notes on particular films.

Small Change, François Truffaut

Truffaut's new film is about the pains and wonders of childhood—his own as invested in a collection of anecdotes about others—and is deceptively artful in achieving seemingly artless effects. *Small Change* is not as minor or as casually sentimental a film as it is willing to seem. The anecdotes are given connection by having the action centered for the most part in two classes in a provincial boys' school, a school which is to become coeducational (a loss of its innocence) the following year. The sweetness of the director's personality informs the various rites of passage we witness, softening some of the blows (a matter of calculation perhaps) without cheapening the vision. At one point an infant falls out of a four-story window and lands miraculously unharmed. My sense is that the audience is treated similarly. *Small Change* is not so much about children as it is a revisit to childhood, showing us the lives of children as if the children were their own camera. The form of Truffaut's film, as opposed to the intrinsic interest of its various narratives, is its triumph. The movie ends with Patrick, one of its two twelve-year-old protagonists, getting a first kiss at summer camp, and the rite of passage is completed. "Children are in a state of grace," says the director's stand-in, in explanation of the infant surviving his seemingly perilous fall,

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and so are we, if tenuously, for the movie's brief duration.

Obssessione, Luchino Visconti

This is the first public showing in this country of Visconti's first film and so, if nothing else, an event of historic interest. Based on the James M. Cain novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice, Obssessione* is an odd, painful film, by turns operatic and naturalistic, an early personal example of what has been called neo-realism. More importantly, it is a work of unmistakable directorial signature. The film has three distinct movements like a piece of music. In the first part, a young stranger and the smoldering, sexually deprived wife of an older man find themselves obsessively attracted to one another. Unable to bear living apart, they contrive the murder of the husband in what is made to seem an auto accident. In the second part of the film, guilt (as obsessive in its own way as erotic fascination) drives them to torment each other and ultimately to separate. In the third part, the lovers are joyfully reconciled, the woman pregnant, only to find themselves pursued by the police who have discovered their complicity in the husband's murder. A second accident ensues—that fatal irony which is a convention of the genre—and the characters come to grief. There is some release for the viewer in the final accident in that it represents the fulfillment of an apparent destiny. The most memorable scene in the film, closer in spirit to Renoir than to those other neo-realists, de Sica or Rossellini, is of the wife, rejected by her lover, falling asleep like a bereft child among piles and piles of dirty dishes, the collective debris of a failed celebration.

Illustrious Corpses, Francesco Rosi

If *Obssessione* deals in the poetics of obsession and frustration, *Illustrious Corpses* frustrates the viewer because of a failure of narrative strategy. An elegant, apparent detective story, tantalizing for about two-thirds of the way, Rosi's grim film refuses to resolve its own mystery, leaving us instead with the radical banality of universal conspiracy—paranoid politics as usual. It reminded me of Pakula's *The Parallax View* in that it assaults and deceives the viewer in order to demonstrate the purity of its cynicism. The distaste it leaves overrides any minor pleasures.

Fear of Fear, Rainer Werner Fassbinder

Fassbinder's films tend to deal with problem subjects (e.g., a lonely young Arab marries an old woman), and are full of melodramatic gesture, yet are visually cool and hard-edged. The mode is at ironic odds, almost at reckoning, with the apparent subject matter and the films are at once serious and self-mocking, not alternatively but at the same time. The problem

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subject of *Fear of Fear* is a woman having a breakdown; the movie seems to pose the question What Does A Woman Do If She Thinks She's Going Mad? and seems at times like an adult comic book about mental health. The movie has a sickly blue green tint, as if everything in it were a life-like plastic imitation. As an indication that the heroine, Margot, is breaking down, the room melts under her stare. It is as if Samuel Fuller had done a remake of Bergman's *Persona.* Margot, the only sympathetic figure in the film, lives a dreary middle-class life with a distracted, boorish husband (or is that merely her dislocated view of him?) and the pressures of that life would be intolerable to anyone. The husband's mother and sister live upstairs and spy on the erratic heroine, intruding clumsily (as in a soap opera) on her prerogatives as wife and mother. The performances—the same actors appear in all of Fassbinder's films—are naturalistic in contradistinction to the film's pop art look. Margot moves from Valium to extramarital sex to alcohol as anesthetics against her panic. *Fear of Fear* breaks through its distancing devices at times to touch us with Margot's despair, but only for moments. Influenced by Godard, though of considerably different temperament, the prolific Fassbinder is a sophisticated, highly intellectual primitive. For all its seemingly antithetical impulses, *Fear of Fear* is a whole, if odd and disturbing, experience.

Serail, Eduardo de Gregorio

This first film by the screenwriter, Eduardo de Gregorio *(The Spider's Stratagem* and *Celine and Julie Go Boating)* is the kind of provocative failure that would be unavailable to us without the New York Film Festival. *Serail* concerns an English novelist looking for a country house in France in which to write his new book. He is also looking for a subject and he elects to buy a chateau in elaborate disrepair in order to observe the three beautiful, role-shifting women who come with the property. The hero discovers that nothing that he writes about the women withstands the next moment's contravening reality (the occupants of the house mysteriously shift identities from scene to scene) and he destroys everything he starts, until the inability to be certain about what he knows, to write anything he can continue to believe is true, drives him into paralysis. The novelist is undone—an odd poetic justice—by his presumptive subject. The narrative works on the level of metaphor, though it has little urgency as experience. This would seem to be a damning complaint, but *Serail* is full of incidental pleasures, both intellectual and erotic. There is much to be said, particularly when most of the films in current release are interchangeable imitations of former successes, for serious and original work of overreaching ambition.

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Duelle, Jacques Rivette

Written in part by the director of *Serail* (and Rivette's influence is pervasive in the other), *Duelle* is an elaborate comic strip conceit, a contest between the Sun Goddess (Bulle Ogier) and the Moon Goddess (Juliet Berto) for possession of a talismanic diamond called The Fairy Godmother. It is a mock detective movie, filmed in Rivette's city of night and influenced, in some small way at least, by Godard's *Alphaville.* There is also some sense of Cocteau, particularly in the shattered mirror scene in the dance hall. Rivette is a major film maker, the most eccentric and adventurous of the French new wave, and his films, which are beautiful, tend to an opacity that may frustrate viewers who are committed to making sense in other language of mysterious and untranslatable experience. *Duelle* mocks and occasions itself, improvising within the framework of a determinedly absurdist mythology. Rivette is a director of great visual wit and *Duelle* relies on the suggestiveness of its imagery for its not inconsiderable achievement.

The Marquise of O . . . , Eric Rohmer

Where Rivette's cinema is seemingly free-spirited and anarchic, Rohmer's offers the illusion of extreme, almost compulsive orderliness. These two apparent opposites have, as might be expected from antitheses, much in common. It is true that Rohmer's work is precise and intellectual (and visually elegant), but it is not without passion and humor and narrative drive. *The Marquise of O . . . ,* from the psychological story by Heinrich von Kleist, is Rohmer's first literary adaptation and perhaps his least literary film. Among the film's other virtues—it is one of the most successful adaptations, faithful and transforming, of a first rate work of literature—*The Marquise of O . . .* is hauntingly detailed. Various images stay with one: The Count in white uniform, always passionately serious, rising out of the night to save the Marquise; the Marquise, under sedative, sprawled seductively in sleep, her virtuous intentions betrayed by her dreams; the Marquise, on her father's lap, being cuddled as if she were a child (or a lover). Rohmer's film, which involves a "virtuous" widow who discovers herself pregnant with no recollection of its occasion, is an anatomy of the duplicity (and sexual looniness) underlying bourgeois morality. As with Rohmer's moral tales, *The Marquise of O . . .* is exquisitely ambiguous, all manifest behavior a displacement of deeper unadmitted concerns. Rohmer uses a German cast (the Peter Stein Theater Troupe) in order to keep the original language of the literary text. It is the film's visual language, however, its fluid, painterly *mise en scène,* that is its transcendent virtue. An attendant irony: in adaptation, Rohmer has achieved his most fully articulated film.

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The Memory of Justice, Marcel Ophuls

Ophuls's earlier nonfiction films, *The Sorrow and the Pity* and *A Sense of Loss*, both of which I admire (although in descending order), did not prepare me for the formal beauty of *The Memory of Justice.* Beauty may seem like an inappropriate word for a documentary investigating the implications of the Nuremberg Trials. The Ophuls film is not journalism, which has given some reviewers difficulty with it, but a didactic work of art. Given the density of the issues and the four-and-a-half-hour running time, the film is a work of near-miraculous coherence. Ophuls uses the same techniques as in the first two films, the telling juxtaposition of interviews with historic documents, offering us a history (and philosophy) lesson through a variety of subtly distorting mirrors. The danger of such a method is either to leave the author's position unfocussed or to foreclose discovery in the interest of high-minded propaganda. The power of the film is its ability to let antithetical views stand side by side without cancelling one another out. Although the material of *The Memory of Justice* is more personal to Ophuls than in the earlier work—he is a German Jew married to a woman who was once a Hitler youth (and that is made part of the story)—the director's vision is astonishingly lucid. To appreciate what Ophuls has accomplished, one has to be willing to hold conflicting ideas in the mind at the same time. To recognize, for example, that the Nuremberg Trials were, on the one hand, self-righteous and misguided, the victors punishing the vanquished, and, on the other, that they established principles of universal law and justice and were motivated by the highest idealism. That they dramatized for the Germans (and others) individual and national responsibility for inhuman behavior and that they permitted the German people, because the trials were conducted by outsiders, to evade guilt altogether. That the very nations that insisted on the Nuremberg precedent willfully and arrogantly ignored it when their own misconduct was at issue and that the Nuremberg precedent gave moral strength to, among others, the resisters of the Vietnam War. That the spirit of Hitler continues to dominate the century and that we are all human and fallible and that justice is a matter of private conscience. The film's heroes are men and women who have either intellectually or in the example of their lives reconciled these oppositions. *The Memory of Justice* is finally inspiriting, a celebration, among the debris of ongoing political injustices, of human decency and courage. As with Hannah Arendt's book on Eichmann, Ophuls's work is bound to be misunderstood and reviled, aspects of it taken to represent the whole. If the New York Film Festival needed justification, and it doesn't, the first public showing of Ophuls's great film would in itself be sufficient.

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ARGUMENT

Robert Boyers

A CASE AGAINST FEMINIST CRITICISM

A large number of literary women in the academy have lately turned to the writing of feminist criticism, clearly conceived as a tool of the larger movement which addresses itself to the condition and experience of women in every corner of the culture. Feminism proposes to "raise consciousness," alter outworn identity-images, and enlarge the range of life choices available to women. Feminist criticism proposes to enhance the prospect for these changes by demonstrating new ways in which to approach a literary or film text. It is nothing so simple as persistent concern for the lives of women characters that feminist critics urge upon their constituencies —all sorts of conventional critics in this century have focussed upon the plight of women in books without in any sense contriving to produce a feminist criticism. What distinguishes ordinary books and articles about women from feminist writing is the feminist insistence on asking the same questions of every work and demanding ideologically satisfactory answers to those questions as a means of evaluating it. Whether the work at hand be *Paradise Lost* or *Emma* or a Sam Peckinpah Western, the essential questions asked will have to do with the status of women characters, the author's and the director's attitude toward these women, and the degree in which role-relations as depicted allow audiences to think of women as the feminists want us to.

A correct work, in the view of feminist critics, is one which portrays women as potentially independent and creative beings who, despite what the culture has done to them in the name of this and that, will never be satisfied with the role stereotypes typically promoted. Books or films which provide a persuasive representation of what life has been for most women, but which do not suggest how profoundly dissatisfied they have been, are reactionary and, by definition, unrealistic. While feminist critics concede that most women have been all too adaptable to normative conventions that injure them emotionally and unnecessarily limit their growth, they argue that simple, even moving representation of such adaptation falsifies the

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genuine reality of women's lives by failing to reflect the possibilities they might have realized had they been conscious of the actual choices. Considerably more vicious, in the feminist view, are works in which women characters fail to adapt but, in failing, achieve nothing but unhappiness and more or less permanent disaffection from the stable norms of their culture. No matter that, in fact, only quite exceptional people do manage to feel satisfied and to grow despite their having refused to adapt and to moderate their demands. Correct works may acknowledge the norms, but will stress that there are people in this world who are ready to resist, and who become all the more appealing, to themselves and to us, in the degree that they elude comfortable solutions. For feminist criticism, the failure of artists to arrive at proper conclusions and to explicitly reject the existence of character types functionally required by the male dominated institutions of advanced capitalism, is unforgivable, humanly and aesthetically reactionary. The view of literary creation implicit in all of this is that the best writers necessarily have what current fashion takes to be the best ideas and opinions, that these ideas take hold of writers before they conceive their creative projects, and direct their efforts. Qualities of temperament and will are ignored or entirely discounted.

Nothing more perfectly illustrates the impoverishment of feminist criticism than recent feminist approaches to the art of film. The problems are usefully concentrated in a book by Joan Mellen, entitled *Women And Their Sexuality In The New Film.* I shall say at once that it is an awful book, and that it is likely to do a great deal of damage. It has been extravagantly praised by a variety of feminists and academics, and is now widely distributed in an inexpensive paperback edition. Moreover, Ms. Mellen knows how to write, and has read just enough Freud, Marx and Reich to sound like she knows what she's talking about. Alas, her book indicates that a little learning is as dangerous as some have said it is.

But let us consider what Ms. Mellen has to say. Her original object was to discover in contemporary films "a new perception of women which assumes their capacities and value." Disappointed in this goal, she wishes in her book to examine the various "negative" images of women projected in recent films, and to urge upon film-makers and film-goers a liberationist discipline that will create a new kind of film informed by "a new perception of women." This is not the place to go into all of the assumptions underlying Ms. Mellen's approach, but surely we can pick at one or two. First, and most obviously, there is the theory of "negative" images. In Ms. Mellen's view, these include most generally "patronizing and hostile portrayal of women as flawed creatures." What, we may wonder, is a patronizing and

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hostile portrayal? It may, in the feminists' judgment, be any one of a number of things: the image of a hard-driving and professionally successful career woman who is, as a result of her ambition, denied more intimate satisfactions; or the portrait of an "empty, disintegrated and alienated" young woman, "a part played frequently in recent years by Karen Black," Ms. Mellen tells us; or, finally, the image of the mildly repressed and cautiously accommodating figure whose attractiveness for men is a function of her posing fewer emotional threats than her liberated sisters. For each of these, and other types of the patronizing and hostile portrayal of women, Ms. Mellen has several examples at hand. Most of these are drawn from films familiar to people with an interest in cinema, and are therefore easily reevaluated in light of Ms. Mellen's analysis. Her theory is that a negative image vividly impressed is not a recognizable portrait of a human being. Any representation of women as flawed or otherwise unhappy people who fail to respond to their situations with anything less than militant and effectual rage will tend to enforce acquiescence in that status as a given of the feminine condition itself. Since we know, or so the argument runs, that there is nothing in femininity itself which requires that women be unhappy or passive or repressed or alienated, why should film-makers represent them as such? Why not show them as vital, positive, integrated? To do so will be not only ideologically correct but realistic, for as all decent people know, real human beings may always shape their lives in accordance with conscious desires.

The theory is feeble on many grounds:

1. It is notoriously imprecise. That is, it makes no distinction between an intention to exalt women, albeit for "incorrect" reasons, and an intention to demean them, for the same reasons. A critical approach to serious films would need to draw such distinctions very carefully indeed to do justice to the complexity and ambivalence of feelings and structures of consciousness illuminated in the film. Consider, briefly, Eric Rohmer's masterpiece *My Night At Maud's*, a film Ms. Mellen treats with some tolerance, even grudging admiration. The film's protagonist is a male, but he moves between two life alternatives vividly embodied by women, one Maud, the other Françoise. Ms. Mellen wants Jean-Louis to select Maud, but he chooses Françoise instead. What's wrong with Françoise? She is the type of the mildly repressed and cautiously accommodating figure mentioned above. Though pretty, she's in no sense as dazzlingly beautiful as Maud, and her imagination is limited and sluggish by comparison with the older woman's. Where Maud is openly sensual and challenging, Françoise is rather timid and old-fashionedly introspective. Though as a student she can aim at all sorts of professional goals, Françoise has decided to be a lab technician; Maud, by contrast, is a doctor.

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Ms. Mellen's approach to the film proposes that Rohmer's vision inevitably demeans women by demonstrating that they will remain unhappy, like Maud, unless they are strenuously unimpressive. In her terms, "the cultural ideal, the blonde, coy, mindless coquette is placed beside an intellectual, witty woman, capable of humor and irony, but unappealing to the hero for her very independence and unique sense of self." We shall overlook the simple fact that Rohmer's blonde is neither coy nor a mindless coquette, and that where coyness and coquetry are concerned, Maud has few equals in recent cinema. The important point is that Rohmer's intention is neither to exalt nor to demean women in general, or the character of Françoise in particular. That his male protagonist should decide to marry her is entirely appropriate given Jean-Louis' temperament and predilections. Had he determined to pursue Maud he'd have discovered in time that he was no match for her, that no matter how carefully she treated him he'd have felt overpowered, pressed beyond his capacities to try to say what he meant and express what he felt. Rohmer's project has nothing to do with the elaboration of a model woman, an entirely positive character type. In the vision of his film, Maud is an appealing and extraordinary person, but her unusual strengths suggest she may have difficulty in personal relations, in the way that extraordinary persons frequently do. To indicate as much is not therefore to recommend we avoid such people or give up emulating them. Rohmer's sensibility is generous and playful in its willingness to entertain various possibilities and to look at liabilities associated with any given choice or character. His idea of them is no more important to the film than their experience of themselves. Both Maud and Françoise know who they are and have some notion of what they may expect from life. Neither would be pleased to stand as emblems for the hope and future prospects of the sex.

2. The theory assumes that represented flaws in women characters who are successfully realized cinematically will stand out from the body of the films and draw the viewer to dwell morbidly upon feminine disabilities. Thus Ms. Mellen's contempt for "the familiar posture of the delighting pessimist." We are reminded at this point of what Fredric Jameson called the "visceral fascination" artists frequently experience in the presence of the "intellectually loathesome." The question is, what effect does this fascination have on the structure of the work and the experience of the viewer? Take the Karen Black character Rayette in the American film *Five Easy Pieces*. Ms. Mellen is offended by her, and clearly feels that no self-respecting, liberated person would bring himself to create such a figure. Now there is no doubt that Rayette is a repellent figure, but her role is drawn with such force and detail, and played with such animation and conviction by Ms. Black, that we do not for a moment want her any other

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way. Though she allows herself to be abused, discounted, mocked by her lover, though the film maker misses no chance to make her a ridiculous working-class piece of ass, she is a successfully realized figure whose presence in the film is essential to its dominant thrust. Does the film maker like Rayette? The question is, in this case and most others like it, beside the point. What he has to like about Rayette is the occasion she provides for a display of wit and the elaboration of a striking character profile. He likes too the way Rayette can be played off against other characters, providing comic relief in otherwise tense circumstances, or pointing up by contrast the relative abstractness of more intellectually impressive figures, the quite different though no less striking ways in which they too are alienated from any genuine sense of who they are.

The film maker, then, is drawn to Rayette on behalf of the color, variety and wit she enables. But it is clear that there is also a "visceral fascination" with Rayette as the incarnation of what is "intellectually loathesome." She has no self-respect. She is content to be a sexual object as long as her basic need to have and hold a man is served by her erotic attraction. She is entirely without cultivation, and without that sensitivity to nuance and irony which we moderns consider exemplary in mature adults. Though she knows how to moan and complain, she does so crudely, with conspicuous indecorum. At the same time, Rayette is a recognizable human being, in the brutishness of her strategems, the earnestness of her entreaties, and the hideous impoverishment of her imagination. She is, for all her repellent qualities, a particular instance of the thing itself, and the film maker is taken with her, precisely as we are, for the range of feelings and thoughts she alone can liberate in him. There is an unmistakable pleasure we take in observing Rayette, even when she is grossly mistreated, for there is in each of us an inarticulate conviction that one so defenseless deserves what she gets. All the more strongly, therefore, do we resent her lover when he steps beyond the limits of 'reasonable' mistreatment, and feel stirred to take her part when she is condescended to late in the film by people who have no idea what such a person may have seen and felt.

This is not the place to dwell at length on a single film or character, but it seems to me essential that we see what the feminist critic will not, whether in *Five Easy Pieces* or in other films. Whatever the represented flaws in a particular character, if the film is worth our attention, the visceral fascination we feel for her will not ensure that we acquiesce in her condition. A major object of criticism will be to discover what relation the character bears to other characters in the film, and in what degree she is essential to the structure of the work as a whole. In the case of *Five Easy Pieces*, to deplore the presence of Rayette in the film is to refuse to see how many different

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feelings and thoughts she evokes, and how well the film maker has drawn the cultural matrix of which she is an integral part. If Rayette is a pathetic and hopeless figure at whom it is possible to laugh, it is not an unqualified or glib laughter she evokes. We do not, in the end, take her for granted, though we know that serious engagement of issues that affect her is beyond her, and will have to be urged upon more competent individuals. What makes Rayette what she is, is not the simple fact that she is a woman, but that she is a particular kind of woman in a culture better equipped to satisfy other kinds. The density of the film's imagined universe is a function of its resistance to the feminist call for willed transcendence, and to other similar demands.

3. The theory assumes that a new perception of women is self-evidently useful and progressive, and that right-thinking people will agree upon an ideological framework in which to structure just such a perception. The issue here is of course much larger than a limited concern with movies and the demands made upon them by feminist critics, and it is not therefore something we ought to neglect. Briefly put, feminist critical theory supposes that in the current state of our culture there can be no rational disagreement on key issues, attitudes which have as a consequence become almost canonically prescriptive. Thus, like most other forward-looking people, Ms. Mellen sneers with knowing disdain at "Catholic doctrine itself which values obedience above individual judgment," and by extension at benighted persons who seek to design their lives in accordance with the values of modesty and obedience. Ms. Mellen finds nothing peculiar or disturbing in the unqualified reliance upon a negative ethic of individual judgment and the appeal to spontaneous emotion. Old-fashioned characters, in this view, have nothing to teach us, and simplicity of conviction is mere simple-mindedness.

Feminist critics find most deplorable any work of art which promotes, no matter how complexly and ambivalently, an idea of women as biologically rooted and therefore limited creatures. This is not surprising, since, if we are to have "a new perception of women," we shall need to believe that there is nothing unalterable, nothing biologically inherent in them, aside from their capacity to bear children. Film directors who suggest that women may suffer because of instinctual drives which at the same time it may not be in their interests to resist or refuse to acknowledge, become enemies of enlightenment, of the emergent brave new world. That is why the great Swedish film maker Ingmar Bergman has become anathema to so many feminists, including Ms. Mellen, who devotes a large part of her book to an attack on his work. Bergman is far from a biological or Freudian reductionist, but he is notoriously committed to a view of human beings, men and women, which insists upon the significance, not the primacy, of instinct and of

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various intransigeant fixations which no amount of cultural engineering and consciousness raising will inevitably affect. An apologist for no ideological position explicitly demeaning to women, Bergman's portraits of confused, anxious, sometimes self-consuming women nonetheless make him a target for those who see in these portraits what Ms. Mellen calls "a repellent biological frailty."

What, we may justly ask, is the particular status of the feminist objection to the idea of biology, or of instinctual disposition? Insofar as it is founded upon nothing but the will to deny the validity of explanations that depend upon such factors, it may be said to fly in the face of ordinary experience itself. Susan Sontag and a number of other brilliant women writers have recently taken up this point, and decried the feminist attempt to dismiss the concrete stuff of historical and present-day experience as so much "epiphenomenal trash." It is true enough that women may usefully be encouraged to undertake projects ordinarily restricted in previous times to men, but it is ridiculous to deny that there may be special consequences owing to this recent encouragement, or that these consequences will have something to do with the organic, instinctual, chemical dispositions of women. Elizabeth Hardwick laid out the terms of the argument with impeccable clarity and wit long before the current feminist movement took definitive shape: " . . . a woman's physical inferiority to a man is a limiting reality every moment of her life. Because of it women are 'doomed' to situations that promise reasonable safety against the more hazardous possibilities of nature . . . and against the stronger man. Any woman who has ever had her wrist twisted by a man recognizes a fact of nature as humbling as a cyclone to a frail tree branch. How can *anything* be more important than this?" Similarly, Ms. Hardwick goes on to argue, though it is stupid "to say women aren't interested in sex *at all*," it is equally stupid to claim that their sexual appetites are the same as men's in intensity or persistence. Women, Ms. Hardwick writes, "fight very hard to get the amount of sexual satisfaction they want—and even harder to keep men from forcing a superabundance their way. It is difficult to see how anyone can be sure that it is only man's voracious appetite for conquest which has created, as its contrary, this reluctant, passive being who has to be wooed, raped, bribed, begged, threatened, married and supported. Perhaps she really has to be." Just as likely, of course, women will differ among themselves as to what constitutes satisfactory levels of accommodation to the surrounding male reality, but it is clear that feminist criticism will need to establish a less willful and dismissive relation to the idea of inherited disposition if it is to make any sense of our shared experience.

Where an artist like Bergman is concerned, of course, any one-dimen-

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sional political approach is likely to do grave violence to the textured complexity of the work. Thus a feminist critic like Molly Haskell in her book *From Reverence to Rape* can tell us that "any criticism of Bergman must be prefaced with the understanding that he, more than any other director . . . took women seriously . . . never thought of them as second-class citizens . . . and watched over the film-birth and blossoming and development of one extraordinary woman after another," only to devalue most of Bergman's recent efforts in favor of the most embarrassing and insipid film he has ever made, *The Touch*. Why? Because the film is ideologically acceptable within the terms of a feminist perspective. Its heroine, a role played with customary artistry by Bibi Andersson, is in every sense an active, thoroughly modern woman. Better yet, she is not one of those standard middle-aged, middle-class wives whose husbands leave them, but a standard middle-aged, middle-class wife who leaves her husband for a wild sexual fling with—God forbid—a Jewish intellectual manqué played with no distinction at all by Elliot Gould. Good for her, Ms. Haskell wants to shout—anything but a "wholesome, antiseptic, normal married life" involving the unnatural suppression of "rude and bloody passions." It is not that Ms. Haskell has no right to her opinions, or that they are poignantly susceptible of evaluation as either trite or ill-considered. What matters is that Haskell has insisted upon looking at Bergman's film as a text holding a brief for a particular view of women. Had she looked at the film as an aesthetic structure with a range of plural intentions she'd have seen that it is unable to elaborate its own images and insights satisfactorily, precisely because Bergman does not believe in his central female protagonist. It is not merely that he doesn't entirely approve of her behavior, but that she moves in a universe alien to his, in a hollow, insubstantial ethical dimension with none of the terrible density and weight we associate with Bergman's work. The film reflects what Haskell's ideology prevents her from observing: the film maker's futile attempt to come to terms with the progressivist, liberationist milieu of the leisure-time audiences who writhe in delighted ecstasies of vicarious pleasure-pain before each of his films. Bergman's film is no simple examination of mass-culture and its insatiable hungers; it is a deliberate and largely unsuccessful capitulation to it. Bergman will not, surely, make another film of this sort.

What Ms. Haskell does with Bergman's poorest film is modest indeed by comparison with Mellen's treatment of his work in general. Whatever her faults, Ms. Haskell is no fanatic, and she appears not to have a taste for deliberate falsification. Ms. Mellen's book, by contrast, is not to be trusted at any point, for each page contains errors and misleading statements indefensible in a serious work of criticism. That the book has been celebrated by feminist academics is enough to warrant skepticism about the intellectual

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honesty and rigor of feminist criticism. The issue here is distinct from our consideration of the claims of feminist criticism to perform a vital function distinguishable from other critical traditions. Though I do not think anyone has made a credible case for feminist criticism as a viable alternative to any other mode, no one can seriously object to feminists continuing to try. We ought, though, to demand that such efforts be minimally distinguished by intellectual candor and some degree of precision. This I have failed to discover in most feminist criticism. In this sense, Ms. Mellen's book is lamentable but not extraordinary, and that is its crucial importance. What are some of the errors and deliberate falsifications? We shall limit ourselves to examples from the treatment of Bergman:

"Yet Bergman's women are soiled by their animal needs and invariably hate themselves." Consider only the characters of Marianne in *Wild Strawberries,* Maria in *The Seventh Seal,* and Desiree in *Smiles of a Summer Night*: no one who has seen these films will support Ms. Mellen's observation. And again:

"Thus the personalities of Bergman's women are fixed and preconceived; they exist beyond change and development." These are difficult terms to deal with, but no one familiar with Bergman should have trouble dismissing the contention. Does the nurse Sister Alma in *Persona* "exist beyond change and development"? What of young Anne in *Smiles of a Summer Night,* or Marianne in *Scenes From A Marriage*? Later on she says Bergman is "completely out of sympathy with the impulse toward liberation and autonomy." Without getting once again into the plausibility of a liberationist ethic, it is surely obvious to all who know Bergman that he admires autonomous women, and anguishes with us over pathologically dependent women. Doesn't he adore Desiree in *Smiles of a Summer Night*, and admire the psychotic determination of Elisabeth Vogler in *Persona*—even as he sees the suffering and coldness of spirit required to purchase extreme autonomy? These are commonplaces of critical observation with which even Ms. Mellen could not disagree.

Mellen is making a case for the eroticism of the central relationship in *Persona.* "In their first encounter Mrs. Vogler grabs Alma's arm: the gesture describes their future relationship." It describes nothing of the sort. The actress desperately grabs Alma's arm to plead with her to turn off the radio which is broadcasting a play the lines of which remind Mrs. Vogler of her own terrible circumstances. "Alma's will begins to break down. Where she began as the independent, self-sufficient partner, she becomes increasingly dependent upon her silent patient." Alma was never confidently independent and self-sufficient in her relation with Mrs. Vogler. After seeing her patient for the first time, Alma suggests to the psychiatric resident that she

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be removed from the case, doubtful that she is strong enough to handle one as determined in her withdrawal from the world as Mrs. Vogler. "An oral sadism develops in Elisabeth's attraction to Alma. In one scene she hits Alma across the face making her nose bleed." I'm not sure what sort of oral sadism might be involved in making someone's nose bleed, but I do know that nothing of the kind is involved in *Persona*. Mrs. Vogler slaps Alma only in a moment of terrible extremity, when Alma has physically attacked her. The slap is a gesture of self-defense, not a rich psycho-sexual manifestation.

It is unnecessary, perhaps even unkind, to go further with this. Readers will have to decide for themselves whether a critique of Ms. Mellen's book may serve as conclusive indictment of what has thus far passed for feminist criticism. At the very least I shall have to hope that this scoring of particular points will not obscure the lineaments of the broader argument.

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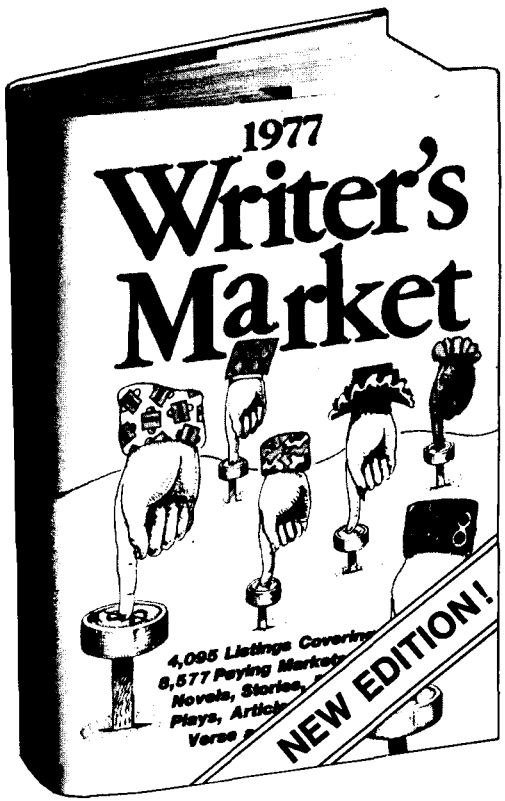

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LOST LIVES

JR. By William Gaddis. Alfred A. Knopf. Paper, $5.95.

> The value placed upon money (not what it procures for you, but *it*) is pathologic. It is the great American malady. . . . The possession of learning, of genius in the arts or sciences—*nothing* seems to weigh in the U.S. in comparison with money. . . . If one wrote something for public consumption on these lines people would sneer, genuinely bored. "Oh yes. The 'almighty dollar' you mean!"—Of course it *is* what I should mean. But it is one of those things which, if only they can survive *identification* and *denunciation,* can go on forever and brazenly endure.
>
> —Wyndham Lewis, *Letters*

> For now long after Wilde had withdrawn to join the compost smoldering in Europe with Pater's recipe for success in life, the tale how for art's sake he'd faced Leadville's bullies to a standoff continued to amuse here where invention was eliminating the very possibility of failure as a condition for success precisely in the arts where one's best is never good enough and who, now the song would play on without losing a note, could resist the temptation to shoot the pianist?
>
> —from Jack Gibbs's uncompleted manuscript, in *JR*

William Gaddis's new novel is about money—its power, its pervasiveness, its curious progression toward the unreal as its quantity increases; it is also and inseparably about the waste of talent, substance, love, and ultimately lives, and the base misuse and destruction of art and intelligence. The literally hundreds of materials used by Mr. Gaddis to deploy and elaborate his themes take their shape as accreted layers of data and innumerable threads, twisted and tangled. It is a magnificent work that is at once savagely comic and drenched in bitter pathos. While it is not tragic, it surely exists at the edge of despair. By a painstaking marshaling of detail, the major characters are given us finally as exhausted, beaten, and desolate.

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It serves no purpose here, in a brief review, to paraphrase the densely crafted plot of *JR*. Suffice it to say that everybody and everything in the novel is interconnected in what might justly be called a perfect if insane logic of possibility. *JR* does not work on the level of a meager naturalism, but supposes a world that exists of and for itself and in which all the characters are rigidly predestined to play out their roles. It is a claustrophobic world that works, within itself, like a syllogism. The author insists on a closed system: that this system plunges, with maniacal precision, toward denouement *within* that greater system that we may label the "real world" makes it no less a creation of supreme effectiveness and fictional truth.

JR, a sixth grade pupil at a gadget-ridden, computerized, and flagrantly intellectually bankrupt public school on Long Island, sits at the center of the novel, a boy who is the epitome of greed, the quintessential product of twentieth-century culture run to seed, plastic, and decay; at the same time, he is vulnerable, alone, touching—a castoff of his society and of his broken family within it. From this center, he sets in motion a chain reaction of financial wheeling-dealing that touches the seats of power where the decisions that affect the structure of the world—its politics, culture, social priorities—are formulated. He is, in his precocious strivings toward acquisition for its own sake, for the sake of attaining whatever, God help him, he may take to be the good life, a perfectly formed miniature of the macrocosm that he imitates. This latter world is given us most clearly in the financial workings of the Diamond Cable Corporation, an industrial giant that controls a good share of the world and many of its leaders, all of whom are bought and sold like shares of stock.

Caught in this vortex are Jack Gibbs, a despairing, cynical, and tortured drunk who cannot finish the book (on the "social history of mechanization and the arts, the destructive element") he has been working on for years—or, more precisely, avoiding working on—and Edward Bast, a young and awkward composer who is a marvel of naïveté, who feels that his art is all that he is here for, and who works like a demented robot. These three are the major figures in the book; dependent from and peripheral to them are perhaps two dozen more, all of whom are locked into the madness that JR's schemes awaken and fuel.

Mr. Gaddis has entwined these characters' lives in such subtle and elaborately complex ways that "answers" or suggestions of possible answers as to their motivations and relationships are not so much given as they are strewn across the novel's pages. The curious and devastatingly poignant links between Bast and Gibbs are spotted throughout the book in an almost casual way; JR may be seen, finally, as a kind of new-model Gibbs or Bast; Gibbs is a gigantically doomed figure—surely the protagonist of the book,

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lost from the start—and Bast is his counterpoint. The complexities are endless and ironic and shattering. Minor characters function in odd, neurotic, yet precise ways, elements of data in this enormous investigation of avarice and waste and their casualties.

Painters are cheated of their money, used and exploited as producers of saleable goods; writers are blocked, thwarted, duped, or twisted into shiny and agreeable hacks; lovers are sacrificed to fates that function as cosmic jokes; a school is perverted, drained, and finally sold; groves of ancient trees are paved over in a "deal" and in another a house is moved; marriages are smashed and soldiers sent to their slaughter carrying toy guns; and all of this (and dozens of more instances of perversion and corruption) is not only inevitable, it is logical, legal, and normal. The cause for this socially acceptable devastation is the quest for profits. On its simplest and most obvious level, *JR* is a compendium of those things that have been done, over the past half-century, to the people of the world by their governments and those whom governments truly serve. It is also, as I hope I have suggested, an investigation of the artist in a society that not only has no need for him but that despises him, and a mordantly limned picture of the "common man" —armed with his manipulated opinions and his jest of a "voice" in public affairs.

I should of course say something about the compositional techniques of the novel. It is completely written, but for brief transitions, in dialogue. Mr. Gaddis's ear is the perfect one of all first-rate novelists, by which I mean his speech as here recorded is beautifully crafted so as to appear to be "real" speech. His characters speak in cadences as precisely stylized as those of, say, Hemingway or Henry Green. It is not the product of the tape recorder that we are given, but the carefully selected and shaped materials that reveal each character as definitely as physical description. The patterns and tics of each character's speech are so brilliantly molded, so subtly and yet totally different one from the other, that the reader, after his first introduction to a character, has no difficulty in identifying that character in subsequent passages. It is a remarkable achievement and, I think, a stroke of genius on Gaddis's part to have structured his novel this way. Not only do we stay in absolute touch with what is being said by everybody, we begin to hear not *only* what is said, but what is *meant.* The "time" of the novel is of course rigorously restricted to the actual time it takes the characters to say what they have to say. Perhaps most importantly, this method of composition allows us to see the surfaces of things—what is really there, what people really appear to be to each other and to eavesdroppers (like the reader). This jettisoning of tawdry and banal "psychological" probing and the "hidden

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motivations'' of characters allows Mr. Gaddis a clean surface, blessedly free of bunkum masquerading as the profound. What we know is what we hear.

JR strikes me as one of the very few distinguished and *written* American novels published in the last decade; indeed, it makes most other novels of this period seem watery or pretentious or both. Its comedy is that of all excellent comic artists—it conceals the ultimately absurd hopes and pretensions of life. It is a brilliant work—a great novel.

BEYOND THE BEDROOM WALL. By Larry Woiwode. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.50.

Beyond the Bedroom Wall displays the talent of its author. In an odd way, its problems are rooted in this fact. Through some six hundred pages that deal episodically with the Neumiller family over three generations, the reader is presented with an almost dogged display of fine writing. It is the kind of writing that can be found in almost every issue of those large monthly magazines that still pretend an interest in ''serious'' fiction, a professional genre writing, the constant delight of editors and reviewers since it is at once neither demanding nor trashy. There's nothing wrong with this—it is very high-class entertainment, as skillfully made as any successful film of the last ten years. It tells the reader what he already knows, a knowledge posited by the entire history of modern fiction; the stimuli, as it were, are carefully placed to elicit the proper responses, just as Woody Allen's work is funny because Perelman invented it.

I am not suggesting that this novel is a failure; it is far from that. And I do not derogate Mr. Woiwode because he is not involved in what is variously called ''superfiction,'' ''metafiction,'' ''surfiction,'' etc., which are academic words tagged on to sundry minor experiments. Nor has Mr. Woiwode made a novel that creaks along in the dear old, and regularly lamented (since it only exists as a tour de force) ''traditional'' mode. He has written, as I've said, episodically, eschewing psychological motivation, tension, character development, climax, dénouement, and so forth. His credentials, as they say, are impeccable. But there is something wrong with the book. It is too shiny and complacent, it is too safe, it is conscious of pleasing.

The novel has its excellent points, surely. Certainly the first-rate sense of place—in this case the Midwest—is one. Mr. Woiwode has an acute feel

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for locale and for the combination of camaraderie and loneliness that small towns throw up like gas stations. He's very good with children—the Neumiller offspring are excellently given, each sketched in a new pose from chapter to chapter as they grow up, so that we see them as discrete entities, not boring instances of development. And his children are neither cute nor monstrous. Tim, as the son who is "left out," might in fact stand as a perfect paradigm of how fictionally to handle a strange child without making him into a wind-up toy like the dopey little girl in *The Bad Seed,* for example. A minor point, but children draw many a dishonest writer on to his deserved destruction. It's much easier to fake adults.

Woiwode often shifts from the third-person into the first and this should work to change the pace and mood of the work. Sadly, though, every time a character thinks in the first person he becomes startlingly articulate, literary, and often pretty flowery. These instances draw Woiwode into his most egregious writing flaw, i.e., the urge toward profundity. For some reason, he finds it almost impossible to handle scenes that deal with profundity of emotion or the "mystery of life" without sliding into a thick, clotted rhetoric that serves only to muddy and cheapen the very emotions he wants to reveal. I'm tempted to say that Mr. Woiwode thinks of this writing as poetic, whereas it is but another assault upon that embattled art. When he describes what people *do* in the grip of deep feeling, he is fine, as witness the first chapter, "Burial." But when he wants to tell the reader what people *feel* his prose becomes, for all practical purposes, inarticulate. It's almost as if these emotional sets generate "thoughts that lie too deep for tears" and the language that attempts to carry them collapses into gunk. This is the opposite of the way poetic language functions, in which the writing becomes clearer as the emotion is focused more sharply.

The people who inhabit the novel are well-drawn, although some of them are too well-drawn, that is, they are Characters with a capital "C." There is a drunken hired man out of central casting, Greenwich Village denizens carting around language and paraphernalia that even a plumber like Tom Wolfe could recognize as spelling "stoned hippie," a third-rate Lower East Side poet who comes across like John Carradine, and who is quite predictably—although I was rooting for Woiwode—bittersweetly shattered. These are all instances of lapses of attention, failures of energy.

The weakest writing in the book occurs after the children are grown and gone from home. It occurs to me that Mr. Woiwode may be lost when he's out of his territory. Certainly, his New York scenes are hopeless, surrendering his absolute sense of place for stock pieces that could be written into scenes for Broadway plays—"Strange and Frenetic New York." Some countermen in a Ukrainian restaurant on Avenue A are turned into noble

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figures, strong men who can cope with life, etc. It is sentimentalizing that nothing can rescue. Woiwode is too good a writer to fall into these traps, but he consistently handles Charles, the son who goes to New York, in this way while he is in New York. He changes from a thoroughly interesting child into a foil against which trite generalizations can be played.

In a very real way, *Beyond the Bedroom Wall* has the same kind of fictional rationale as do *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River.* It's a fond and penetrating look at a lost life, a way of laying ghosts. And like Wolfe, Woiwode cannot resist the temptation to make his people into giants—taciturn, brave, deep, wise, beautiful, effective, strong. Their very plainness is tortured into heroism. To handle plain people plainly, and at the same time to make them reveal the truth about themselves and their community is quite possibly the hardest thing that a writer can do. There they stand: dull, boring, ordinary—yet unique and absolute. How to make them interesting? But is that even the question? I don't think so. The question may be: How does one carry the plainness into fiction so that the character does not become a Character, does not become a falsification? Flaubert did it, and so, in our own literature, did Williams, two writers uncanny in their ability to find the glint of truth in the most banal situations. We see, through their ordinary characters, an entire world without distortion of either world or characters. Woiwode's characters, in so far as they are gigantic, are unreliable. They are, so to speak, historical without being history.

Despite these faults, it is a good book, one among a paltry few each year. For this reason alone, it is notable. As I have said, its author is talented, but I feel, ungenerously, that Woiwode has not demanded enough of his talents in this novel. Nowhere does he chop and fight against his material. There is no section, no chapter, no paragraph that strikes as being written uphill, written against what came most readily to hand. The novel takes the path of least resistance throughout, and one gets the sense that the author, in composing the book, discovered nothing that he did not already know. The whole is a kind of explication of given materials and ideas, a vast set-piece. The work lives in that area in which the author is comfortable. The novel lacks what can be called a poetic impulse—though it is filled with "poetry." It is talented. It is professional. It is, God knows, well written. But it is not enough.

GILBERT SORRENTINO

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FATHER FIGURES

WORLD OF OUR FATHERS: THE JOURNEY OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWS TO AMERICA AND THE LIFE THEY FOUND AND MADE. By Irving Howe. With the Assistance of Kenneth Libo. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $14.95.

When it arrives at the point at which its achievements are summed up and a reckoning presented, a culture has gotten as far beyond the tragedies of its own history as is humanly possible. To understand this is to understand the tough integrity of Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers*, a great work of the historical imagination and a painful elegy in which the author's own sense of loss is matched by his insistence on seeing a dying culture as it was, its limitations as well as its attractions carefully placed before the reader. Working from within the crucible of his own past, Howe evokes the world of the Eastern European Jews in America almost as if he were writing memoirs rather than history. It is a remarkably personal book. And it demands a personal response. If we are still close enough to a world so that the writer can force us to trace our own lives from its not yet hidden swirls, then history, like fiction, is inevitably *personal* and *intimate*. And if, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, you have struggled with your own duality, *your* American matched against *your* Jew, then *World of Our Fathers* is your history because the hand lies heavy on your back.

But if the legacy is ours, the story Howe tells belongs to the fathers. "We need not overvalue the immigrant Jewish experience in order to feel a lasting gratitude for having been part of it." The peculiar nature of the immigrant response to America, this *goldneh medinah* which was both blessed and cursed (often in the same breath), formed the basis for the ways in which their children and grandchildren would deal with America. To claim for the Jewish experience of America an uncontested singularity would be false. But it would be equally false to subsume that experience within the general context of immigrant history. The Jews were similar to and yet unlike other peoples who come to these shores. They possessed the culture of Yiddishkeit and because of that they brought to the immigrant's tribulations something new. Carrying within itself the seeds of its own dissolution, Yiddishkeit succeeded in creating a particular tone for urban America, a tone which, as the culture which gave it life recedes into memory and myth, continues to exert its hold on those who have inherited the voice while no

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longer understanding the language. The true subject of *World of Our Fathers* is the dissolution of the world of Yiddishkeit, a dissolution which today seems irremediable, inevitable, even self-willed.

The culture of Yiddishkeit was a folk culture given powerful literary expression at exactly that moment in history when its death throes had been set in motion. The Enlightenment had already doomed Yiddish as a language—although Hitler and his minions hurried the process of destruction by a century—and there cannot be a culture without a language. It is difficult to believe that Yiddish could have withstood the impact of modernism. Its strength was residual, strongly tied to tradition and parochialism as well as to its need to insulate itself from a world it at once envied and regarded with long-conditioned hostility. Perhaps its chief glory in America must be seen as its willingness to sacrifice itself. Was there, among other immigrant peoples, a verbal construction similar to *tsu oysgrinen zikh*—"to cease being a greenhorn"? Ignorant of the ways of America, the *grine* was, by definition, a barrier to children determined to live what "acculturation" meant even before they had heard the word. Yiddish journalists might sigh in print for "the old country," but they rarely failed to exhort their fellow immigrants to learn English, to Americanize themselves as quickly as possible, to let the *shtetl* dissolve in its own bones while their children came to terms with the menace and promise of urban America. Yiddish socialists and trade unionists employed their rich language to satisfy the Jewish craving for universal brotherhood, which, like Christianity, possessed its greatest appeal to those who were homeless and uprooted and poor, dreadfully poor, poorer than it is possible for their Scarsdale-reared grandchildren and great-grandchildren to believe.

One reads the familiar details of that poverty in *World of Our Fathers*. And one wonders whether it is of any use to remember that the population density of the Yiddish Lower East Side at the turn of the century was probably greater than that found in any other place at any other time. The fact is that the Yiddish Lower East Side is finished. And the poverty has itself been banked as a platitude. Success creates its own illusions. For the well-fed young, poverty may even be attractive. But for those reared in the culture of poverty, it is simply the inevitable accent of the collective voice. In the Yiddish world, the poor were a mirror of the collective strivings as well as the collective fate. The poor constituted both audience and material. It is not by accident that the writer and his audience were cemented together here as they have never really been in the American world. The Scarsdale grandchildren may feel a twinge of what is today called "ethnic pride" when they read that Sholom Aleichem's funeral in the Bronx was attended by 100,000 people; the grandparents would simply have accepted this,

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too, as an aspect of the culture of poverty. If the poor were both audience and material, then the writer's voice was their voice simply because neither they nor the writer had any recognizable existence outside of the other. Yiddish literature had to be parochial, since its concerns, even in America, were rooted in the history and condition of its audience. Its parochialism was of its audience's world. In his introduction to *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, published more than twenty years ago and still the best essay available in English on Yiddish literature, Howe wrote,

> Because of its own limitations, the world of the East European Jews made impossible the power-hunger, the pretensions to aristocracy, the whole mirage of false values that have blighted Western intellectual life. *The virtue of powerlessness, the power of helplessness, the company of the dispossessed, the sanctity of the insulted and injured*—these, finally, are the great themes of Yiddish literature.

Such themes are rooted not in the writer but in the culture itself. We have, of course, confronted this kind of thing in others: in the Orwell who stalks the streets of Paris and London trying to expiate in himself the sins of capitalism and the crimes of colonialism; in Silone's understanding that socialism must derive as much from the *cafoni* of the Abruzzi as from the relentless theorizing of its intellectuals; even, perhaps, in the harsh ambivalence of Lawrence's attitudes toward the English working classes or Faulkner's mellowing willingness to let the Snopses, the "white trash" of his world, speak for themselves and possess their triumph. But none of these writers embodies the attitude of an entire culture toward poverty.

In *World of Our Fathers*, Howe has managed that most difficult of historical voices, a mixture of objectivity and compassion. And he never permits himself to fall into the temptation to sentimentalize, to make of the Yiddish Lower East Side world something greater than what it was. He knows that much of the power it exerted and the loyalty it commanded was directly due to its parochialism. He knows that, like other languages, Yiddish was subject to short spasms of growth interrupted by long periods of quiescence. But he also knows that Yiddishkeit as a cultural force was impossible to replace. With its demise, whatever cohesiveness there had been to American Jewish life began to disintegrate. At one and the same time, Yiddish had turned inward and outward, embracing American life yet retreating from American values, acculturating American parochialism (articles in the *Forward* explaining baseball to bewildered *grine* fathers) yet insisting on its singularity. A culture of contradictions, Yiddishkeit brought its tensions to American shores. It was, in fact, confused by American life. What was bewildering about America was that it could not really be explained in terms

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of the *shtetl* past; it threatened the Jew in areas in which he had been most secure and did not threaten him in areas in which he had been most vulnerable. "In America," my grandmother used to tell me, "they kill us with candy."

Howe begins his history of the Eastern European Jewish encounter with America with the pogroms that followed the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. This was the signal that set in motion the great migration to America, just as it was the event that gave impetus to the small but growing Zionist movement in Russia. The story of the migration has been well-documented, and Howe draws upon the richness of the Yiddish sources not to repeat what we already know, but to create a composite portrait of an experience which, no matter how singular it seemed to the immigrants, was essentially collective. But while "Toward America" is fascinating, the true power of *World of Our Fathers* is not really developed until the long second and third sections, "The East Side" and "The Culture of Yiddish."

In "The East Side," the isolation and astonishment of the new immigrants is portrayed through a composite of recollections. In large part, the Jewish immigrants were simply experiencing what other non-English speaking immigrants had experienced. It was not poverty that plagued them, since they were conditioned to poverty. But the *shtetl* world had broken up and what took its place was the Lower East Side. The immigrants who came between 1881 and 1905 were the lost souls, the *farloyrene menshn,* of the Yiddish world. Even today, in the rapidly dwindling population of the Yiddish-speaking world, it is a generation which possesses an awesome moral currency. To mention the first wave of immigrants is to evoke images of a world so strange, so hostile, that survival as Jews simply could not be assumed. And yet, America was—and Howe takes great pains to show this—generous to the new immigrants. Ultimately, the majority managed to find work, to begin the process of acculturation, to lift themselves up economically. And they were treated relatively decently by those who, like the Irish, and the German Jews, had themselves arrived in America only a few decades earlier. It is in Nathaniel Hawthorne's words that Howe summarizes the condition of the first immigrant generation. "In this republican country, amid the fluctuating waves of our social life, somebody is always at the drowning-point."

But the sense of loss overwhelmed them. Russia, the land from which they had fled, became a kind of inverted passion, a cultural barometer by which all else was measured. No matter how raw and cruel and brutalized life had been there, it possessed the stamp of the familiar. "I am overcome with longing," Howe quotes one of the early immigrants, "not only for my Jewish world, which I have lost, but also for Russia." Only one among the

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multitude of ironies that dot the landscape of Yiddishkeit. But it is an important one. It helps to explain a great deal about the attitude the Jews brought to America and which they were to will their children. And it forces one to recognize the sense of déjà vu which lingers about Jewish life in America. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren are still players of the Yiddish game—even if they are incapable of recognizing it. Compare this description of radical Yiddish intellectuals in the 1880s with their Ivy-educated offspring of the 1960s and '70s.

> They knew little about the conditions of the Jewish working class in Eastern Europe, still in its early stages of formation, and knew next to nothing about the conditions of the working class in America, either native or immigrant. Declamatory, impassioned, theoretic, and sectarian to the marrow, these pioneer radicals sometimes called themselves socialists and sometimes anarchists, but they really had little of any tradition to go by. They were a mixture of socialist, anarchist, positivist, village atheist, and enlightened young Jews in love with the heroic style of the Russian populists.

The stereotypes that have been thrust upon the American Jew, from the much derided "Jewish mother," to the idea that Jewish socialism was cultural rather than political, are a useful index to the dissolution of Yiddish culture in America. Inheriting the culture of contradictions, the Jew's adaptation to the demands of American life was itself contradictory. And yet, the compromises that he made were fairly successful. If Jewish trade unionism represented the victory of practical politics over faith in messianic socialism, it was a victory with which the mass of Jewish workers were content to live. Even in the most radical of the Jewish unions, the leadership had to face the problem, so common in American life, of sacrificing long-range goals for short-range interests. Jewish workers were probably more class-conscious than their native American counterparts. But their class consciousness could not survive in isolation. The failure of the Jewish Left, if that is what it is, reflects the wider failure of the Left in America. And the self-educated Jewish worker, so memorably brought back to life in these pages, remains one of the more attractive figures produced by any working class. He serves, too, as a useful reminder of a time when, for the worker, "liberation" meant both the ability to live without hunger and the time to ponder "the connection between Herbert Spencer and the Vilna Gaon." Like the Jewish mother, the passion for education that was so vital an aspect of the culture of Yiddishkeit has been transformed into a vulgar joke, a transformation accomplished by those who benefitted from the passion.

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In "The Culture of Yiddish," Howe depicts a culture in the strikingly singular position of moving from parochialism toward complexity as it moved toward its own destruction.

> Is there anything comparable in the whole modern period? An uprooted people, a broken culture, a literature releasing the crude immediacies of plebian life, at once provincial in accent and universalist in its claims.

The question is not merely rhetorical. The deepest attraction that the Yiddish world can claim today is that it was a true culture of *folkmassn.* If its relationship to modernity remained peripheral, its strength lay in its unusual melding of worker and intellectual. When Shelley labelled poets "the unacknowledged legislators of the universe," he was indulging in rhetoric. But when Peretz wrote, "Art is the soul of the people, the personality of a nation," his audience understood that if it was *his* art it was *their* soul and personality he was talking about. To a degree perhaps never since matched, worker and artist were united in the Yiddish world. Often, they were indistinguishable.

> Imagine in any other literature the turn to impressionism or symbolism being undertaken by a shoemaker and a house painter, the dismissal of the social muse by men laboring in factories!

Yiddish was a language which was, inevitably, used to keep the nonYiddish world at a distance. "As against the crumbling of history, the Yiddish world remained an unsleeping witness."

World of Our Fathers is an act of piety, but a remarkably objective piety. Howe writes with a certainty of purpose, a sense of finality, that is one of the sadder gifts his history imposes. Only in the final section, "Dispersion," where he traces the breakup of the fathers' world and deals directly with the contributions of their offspring, does the reader suspect that Howe is not altogether at home with his material. For Howe's argument with the descendents has become part of his argument with our times. It is difficult to see where one can draw the line. *World of Our Fathers* is itself part of the argument—at least I suspect it is. In insisting on our recognition of the achievement of Yiddishkeit, Howe indicts all cultural disaffiliation.

And yet, something of the culture lingers. It will not wholly die, nor is it absorbed in quite the way Howe indicates here. There remains, on his part, a kind of impatience with the young, as if they, in some mysterious manner, were responsible for the inability of the culture of Yiddishkeit to get beyond its tragic history. It is a disturbing quality in an historian so

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compassionate and a critic so catholic. One saw this quality at work in a recent review Howe wrote of Leonard Michaels's *I Would Have Saved Them If I Could*. What is peculiar about this is that Michaels is one of the very few writers I know of who is trying to bridge the gap between Yiddishkeit and modernism, to cement the parochial complexities of the remnants of Lower East Side life to the freezing away of *menschlichkeit,* both Jewish and American. He does not always succeed in this, but he is one of the few who makes the attempt. And, as Howe himself points out, it is the question of how we are to live that "is the single commanding power of the Yiddish tradition." In our own time, the question is still asked and the attempt to answer it must still be made—even by the grandchildren. Now, here, and in an America which grows daily as distant from us as it must have been from our parents.

But that is a personal argument, the kind *World of Our Fathers* inspires. In a brilliant essay on Eastern European Jewish history as it seemed after the Holocaust, Abraham Heschel wrote, "Solidarity with the past must become an integral part of our existence." *World of Our Fathers* is a remarkable example of such solidarity. To read it is to be in Howe's debt.

LEONARD KRIEGEL

THE MAD SENSE OF LANGUAGE

THE GRAVE OF THE RIGHT HAND. By Charles Wright. Wesleyan University Press. $2.00.

HARD FREIGHT. By Charles Wright. Wesleyan University Press. $3.45.

BLOODLINES. By Charles Wright. Wesleyan University Press. $6.00.

When Charles Wright's poems work, which is most of the time, the poetic energies seem to break the membrane of syntax, exploding the surface, reverberating in multiple directions simultaneously. It is not a linear progression one finds but rather a ricocheting, as if, at the impact of a single cue, all the words bounced into their pockets, rearranged, and displaced themselves in different directions all over again. And it seems to happen

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almost by accident, as if Wright simply sets the words in motion and they, playing a game according to their own rules, write the poem. Certainly Wright is aware of this strange power of words; all three of his books contain poems which, strictly speaking, refer only to words and their maneuverings. Here is one from *The Grave in the Right Hand:*

Black Sonnet

0. Psittacosis
1. Cuckoopint
2. Reliquary
3. Pysidium
4. Entelechy
5. Wyvern
6. White bryony
7. Zymotic
8. Contrapposto
9. Typolysis
10. Syzygy
11. Anti-matter
12. X
13. Carthago delenda est

Whereas "Black Sonnet" is raunchy and humorous, a sort of burlesque in which the words parade themselves like Las Vegas showgirls, "Tattoos 12," another poem about words, from *Bloodlines*, displays a different kind of word eroticism which operates between the words themselves. It is an eroticism which some might deem perverse in that the words seem to be attracted to each other through a dynamic which appears to defy not only syntax but semantic "sense":

Oval, oval oval oval push pull push pull . . .
Words unroll from our fingers.
A splash of leaves through the windowpanes,
A smell of tar from the streets:
Apple, arrival, the railroad, shoe.

The words, like bees in a sweet ink, cluster and drone
indifferent, indelible,
A hum and a hum:
Back stairsteps to God, ropes to the glass eye:
Vineyard, informer, the chair, the throne.

Mojo and numberless, breaths
From the wet mountains and green mouths, rustlings,
Sure sleights of hand,
The news that arrives from nowhere:
Angel, omega, silence, silence . . . "Tattoos 12"

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One reads a poem like "Tattoos 12" and the first response is "that felt good!"; and only later . . . "what happened?" Of course, Wright's poems are not without "sense," not without conceptual-symbolic dimensions, but it is the sense of primal consciousness, the sense of paradox and multiplicity that binds these words and their meanings. Or, to use Lacan's terminology, it is "the letter in the unconscious," which, though it may oppose conscious purpose, is never arbitrary. So in the afterglow of the initial reading one can go back and, unwinding the words from their embrace, realize, for example, that the reason "oval oval oval oval" works so well with "push, pull" is that an oval is a circle which has been squeezed, "pushed," or elongated, "pulled," at two points, that oval is the transcendent ease of the perfect equilibrium of the circle being subjected to pressure. The oval is also an egg, birth, the push and pull of form coming into existence. And what do "apple, arrival, the railroad, shoe" have to do with each other? Is this just perverse eroticism at work again? No, there is meaning in the apparent madness. All the words are related to movement—the "apple" to the movement toward knowledge, the expulsion from grace, the fall into the limits of temporal existence and guilt. With "apple" in the first slot and "arrival, the railroad, shoe" functioning as substitutions thereafter, the series together carries meanings of movement-knowledge-guilt-limit with a progressive emphasis on limitation: "apple" signifying a transcendental causal function; "arrival," because it is used nonspecifically, signifying an abstract goal of movement; "railroad" reducing the abstract movement to a finite vehicle of movement; and "shoe" further restricting movement and the vehicle of movement. The limit-restriction element is both a reverberation back to and an amplification of the first line—that is, it amplifies the sense of stress of "oval" and "push, pull" and it extends the notion of imperfectness implied there. The movement-knowledge-guilt-limit motif is also evident in the second, third, and fourth lines: "windowpanes," suggesting consciousness itself which receives the knowledge, immediately becomes contaminated with the "smell of tar," black, sticky, clinging guilt. Further, all of these motifs get connected with the "meaning" of words: after the first line, which simply establishes a process, comes the first subject in the poem ("words") and all the subsequent subjects which follow must be seen as substitutions, replacements, which serve to multiply the significations connected with that first subject. So, the first stanza as well as the entire poem is about words, about the way they come to carry meaning, the dynamic that exists between words as signifiers and the things they signify, the guilt of words as opposed to the purity of silence.

Anyway, after making meaning sense of these things, after justifying

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the words, one feels almost that the explanation is a rationalization of sorts. The simple truth is that one is hooked on the words and that Wright's power as a poet lies in just this ability to hook us, to intoxicate us with a language that radiates paradox—that is, the realm of symbol. To accomplish this demands, I think, a kind of surrender on the part of the poet, a loosening of intent, a trusting in the mad sense of language. And, in fact, Wright's poetry fails when he refuses to surrender enough, when he holds the reins on the words too tightly, when he seems too intent upon getting an idea across and, ironically, ends up writing poems less rich in meaning. But when the right balance between abandon and control is achieved, the nature of the tension is erotic:

> Carafe, compotier, sea shell, vase:
> Blank spaces, white objects;
> Luminous knots along the black rope.
>
> The clouds, great piles of oblivion, cruise
> Over the world, the wind at their backs
> Forever. They darken whomever they please.
>
> "White"

The connective threads, the concepts, that run through Wright's poems and make his collection read, as James Tate puts it, "like a book not a miscellany," have to do with Wright's insistence that the human is but one system, one way of ordering, one center exerting its force while simultaneously being permeated by the force of other systems, that progress in terms of any single system is an illusion; the center is always shifting. There is simply process, displacement, the perpetual turning of transformation:

> You thought you climbed, and all the while you descended
> Go up and go down, what other work is there
> For you to do, what other work in this world?
> The seasons back off. The hills
> Debase themselves, and keep on growing. Over the land,
> Your feet touch down like feathers,
> A brushstroke here, a gouge there, lacking a print
> Always, and always without direction.
> Or so it seems. But what, for one meandering man,
> Is all that, who looks for the willow's change,
> The drift and slip of smoke through the poplar leaves.

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The cliff's dance and wind's shift,
Alone with the owl and the night crawler
Where all is a true turning, and all is growth.
"Skins 19"

In each of his books, Wright has moved closer and closer to this radical level: in his latest book, he situates himself, metaphorically, in the flux itself. It is the numen of the blood that Wright explores in *Bloodlines.* In "Virgo Descending," the first poem in the collection, Wright draws us directly into a transformative dissolution and leads us to an archetypal image of the blood, the high priestess of the irrational, chthonic forces—the Great Mother:

Through the viridian (and black of the burnt match)
Through ox-blood and ochre, the ham-colored clay,
Through plate after plate, down
Where the worm and the mole will not go,
Through ore-seam and fire-seam,
My grandmother, senile and 89, crimpbacked, stands
Like a door ajar on her soft bed.
"Virgo Descending"

Significantly, in "Virgo Descending" there is no directive agent, no subject which initiates the action. Instead, there is simply process itself and various stages in this process; the grandmother image does not signify an end stage of the process but rather its final opening-out. The grand-Great-mother is crimpbacked and senile. There is something monstrous about her and her senility implies the irrationality of her nature. At the same time, she embodies an awful receptivity to those elements which are outside reason; she is openness, the "door ajar," and even "the worm and the mole will not go" there. Yet this is precisely where Wright takes us, into a place where there are no stable subjects, only momentary foci or centers of action, where the "I" itself is a "something else" that is, subjectively, nothing because it is perpetually subject to change:

Now I am something else, smooth,
Unrooted, with no veins and no hair, washed
In the waters of nothingness
Anticoronal, released . . .
"Tattoos 5"

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The release from stable identity to process brings with it a "release" from security. It is a willingness to accept a subjectless play of forces similar to the Oriental concept of Tao and Wright's insight is that as long as one yearns for a permanently fixed center, an arbitrary pattern not found within the flux, within the blood (blood lines) there will, ironically, be only emptiness:

> Trust in the fingernail, the eyelash,
> The bark that channels the bone.
> What opens will close, what hungers is what
> goes half-full.
> "Easter, 1974"

KATHLEEN AGENA

IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

WEIMAR: A CULTURAL HISTORY 1918-1933. By Walter Laqueur. G.P. Putnam's Sons. $8.95.

THE SEA CHANGE: THE MIGRATION OF SOCIAL THOUGHT, 1930-1965. By H. Stuart Hughes. Harper & Row. $10.00.

One notices a marked contrast in current concerns with Weimar culture. While there is a great deal of admiration for the literary and artistic creativity that flourished during the brief span of the Weimar period, there is also the sobering knowledge of all that was to come after. Was Weimar perhaps just a prelude to the silence that followed? It may be that these apparently contradictory trends—the intense creativity and the course toward debacle—are after all somewhat related. H. Stuart Hughes has said about the Weimar period that, "on the edge of the precipice, the more perceptive of the German intellectuals had attained an intensity of consciousness that recalled the reputed clairvoyance of the dying." It is an observation that carries much weight, and it accounts in part for the fascination that the period has for many American intellectuals at this critical juncture in our history.

Some will have it that the efflorescence of modernistic culture in the Germany of the twenties was at least in part responsible for the breakdown

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and the barbarism of the thirties. Walter Laqueur by no means shares these conceits, even though there are hints here and there in his work that things might have been a bit better had Weimar intellectuals, instead of being perennial *frondeurs,* shown a bit more attachment to the Republic. In fact, such notions vastly overestimate the influence of intellectuals in the world of public affairs. France did not fall because of André Gide's undermining of the received moral verities of French bourgeois culture, and Weimar's collapse was hardly due to Brecht or Piscator.

We tend to look at Weimar through distorted lenses when we focus attention on its left-wing intelligentsia, and fail to notice, as Laqueur reminds his readers, that most of the authors who were successful in terms of the general public did not represent what has come to be seen as the Weimar *Zeitgeist.* The German liberal, and largely Jewish, public read Thomas Mann and his brother Heinrich, Stefan and Arnold Zweig, Werfel, Wasserman, Hofmannsthal and Hesse, and did not come near such popular best-sellers as Hans Grimm's *Volk ohne Raum,* the war writings of Ernst Juenger, or the novels of Hans Carossa. The German reading public as a whole never accepted the cultural predominance of the modernistic culture of Berlin. The two leading left-wing weeklies of Weimar, the *Weltbuehne* and the *Tage-Buch*, had a very small circulation. The Weimar intellectuals of the "homeless left" believed that they were at the hub of post-war German culture, but they were mistaken. Wrote Kurt Tucholsky, the most brilliant and most prolific of the *Weltbuehne* collaborators, "Travel across the world from the North Pole to the South Pole, you will find that everything takes place among two hundred people." This is how it may well have felt to many among his co-thinkers, but in retrospect what was meant as an acute insight sounds merely silly. Only rather late in the game did the intellectual left and the artistic vanguard realize that in their self-absorption and their belief that they alone occupied the center of the stage they had woefully neglected the ugly portents brewing in the wings.

It is Laqueur's merit that he provides a full panoramic presentation, sketchy though it often is, of the whole of the culture of Weimar. He devotes a full chapter to the left-wing intellectuals, but reminds us in the next chapter that right-wing thought continued to have major appeal, and that not all of its spokesmen from Spengler to Juenger to Moeller van den Brook or Niekisch were simply proto-Nazi pamphleteers. While he devotes a major part of the book to the avant-garde, he also speaks of opposing forces, showing that the academy continued to harbor the strongest aversion to the "decadent" and "corrupting" influences of the culture of modernism.

Yet it remains that for just fifteen short years Germany was the arena of an experiment in cultural innovation unique in its penetration and daring.

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Not only in philosophy or poetry, in which Germans had a long and distinguished tradition to draw upon, but even in fields such as painting and architecture, which had been barren in the nineteenth century, Weimar culture produced breakthroughs of enduring significance.

What accounts for this amazing efflorescence is still not entirely clear. Peter Gay surely provides some answers when he argues that the "outsiders" of Wilhelminian Germany had now in large part become "insiders" that found support, grudging though it often was, among at least some of the administrators, politicians, and opinion leaders of the regime. In addition, World War I had broken cultural continuities and shattered tradition more brutally in Germany than in other western countries. The break with the past was more pronounced in the country that had lost the war than among the victors. Moreover, it may well be that the very instability of the Republic, its lack of firm institutional moorings which so distressed political observers and filled some of them (rightly so, as it turned out) with dark forebodings, provided at the same time the preconditions for restless questioning and acute cultural sensibility. Throughout the period, German intellectuals found themselves in what the existentialists among them called an extreme situation, one that encouraged them to explore the limits of cultural experimentation.

Laqueur does not investigate these questions in any depth. He lacks the analytical virtuosity displayed in Peter Gay's earlier *Weimar Culture* (which, curiously enough, Laqueur does not even mention), but he provides a plethora of factual information that will provide indispensable material for anyone who wishes to probe more deeply in the future.

In *The Sea Change*, H. Stuart Hughes explores the migration to Britain and America of German and Italian intellectuals in the nineteen thirties. He follows a course that is markedly different from that of Laqueur in that he is highly selective. Yet I fear that he did not take full advantage of that selectivity in order to search more thoroughly than Laqueur's encyclopedic approach would have permitted. Hughes deals with some of the crucial figures of the German and Italian emigration from Salvemini to Mannheim, from Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse to Borgese, Wittgenstein, and Tillich. He presents sharply drawn vignettes of their lives and work, but rarely examines in some depth the sources of their creativity in their adopted environment. He wishes to inquire "how the experience in America altered the character of their thought," but does not sufficiently answer his own query. While he provides a novel illumination in his pen portraits of people whom he has known personally, and brings to life some psychoanalysts such as Hartmann and Erikson, he is less successful with Wittgenstein or the writers of the Frankfort School, especially since much more thorough treat-

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ments of them have become available in recent years. In addition, for reasons unknown, some major intellectual currents that also came to us from abroad, such as Gestalt psychology, or the work of Hayek and Popper, are not dealt with at all so that the book has a fragmentary character. As a result, it does not have the breadth of Hughes's earlier brilliant synthesis of European *fin de siècle* thought, *Consciousness and Society*. But perhaps I mistake Hughes's intentions and take for the main course what was meant as an appetizer. Readers unfamiliar with the social thought of the refugee intellectuals may find here perceptive sketches of some representative figures which might whet their appetite for more searching analyses. Some of Hughes's students, notably Martin Jay, have under his guidance already presented detailed discussions of some of the figures he treats here; other figures still await more extended treatment. In the meantime Hughes has opened a vein which is likely to provide valuable ore for future historians of intellectual life in America.

LEWIS COSER

THE REALITY OF EVIL

THE SURVIVOR: AN ANATOMY OF LIFE IN THE DEATH CAMPS. By Terrence Des Pres. Oxford University Press. $10.00.

THE HOLOCAUST AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION. By Lawrence L. Langer. Yale University Press. $12.50.

> All friends shall taste
> The wages of their virtue, and all foes
> The cup of their deserving.

Albany says this at the end of *King Lear*, after Lear himself has entered with his daughter dead, and I mention it here because it seems to me a perfect example of the mentality of the survivor. Next to Albany on the stage the King is breaking, a kind of black light pours from him, but the Duke, who will survive, cannot see it. He is too busy making up his little moral jingle, reconstructing a universe in which the bad are punished and

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the good surely prosper. It is, of course, the only thing to do if you are going on living. Terrence Des Pres, in his luminescent and limited book, *The Survivor*, understands such tragic solutions very well:

> We may find, in the end, that the hero's death is appointed—that one of the functions of culture is to provide symbolic systems which displace awareness of what is terrible, and that through death the hero takes upon himself the condition of victimhood and thereby grants the rest of us an illusion of grace.

A part of Des Pres's argument is that "the age of heroes is gone" and that the burden of heroism has been shifted to anyone in extreme circumstances (preeminently the concentration camps) "who manages to stay alive in body *and* spirit, enduring dread and hopelessness without the loss of will to carry on in human ways." This kind of courage is not absent from tragedy—Oedipus possessed it, certainly, at Colonus—nor has the sense of it ever been lacking in the world. Think, for example, of the mana, the magical power, the luck, that attaches itself to certain boulders, and the holy awe with which primitive peoples came to regard them, simply because the old stones had endured so long. Surely Des Pres is right to think of the tenacity of his heroes—clinging to their humanity, indeed growing into it—as no less miraculous.

By a survivor Des Pres does not mean someone who merely came through the death camps alive. He knows that for the Nazis, for Stalin, "the death of the soul was aimed at"; the survivor, then, is someone who resisted that onslaught. His antithesis is not the man or woman or the child selected for the gas and the oven, so much as the *Muselman*, one of the "walking dead," who shuffled everywhere, not speaking, not seeing, not eating even: *dokhodyaga*, "the goners," they called them in the Soviet camps. But Des Pres's portrait of the survivor—decent, sharing, unafraid, with his dignity and even a kind of purity intact, burning with the desire to bear witness, and above all growing in his sense of connectedness to others—this portrait, while beautiful, while surely true of the men and women who speak to us directly throughout the text, nonetheless raises a number of problems which I have found to my own dismay I cannot ignore.

In the first place, it is difficult to read this book without coming to think that the survivor, "the figure who emerges from all those who fought for life in the concentration camps," stands for each person liberated in 1945. On only one page does Des Pres indicate that there is "more than one way to survive," and nowhere does he state what he must know to be true—that the men and women he describes were not typical of the hundreds of thousands who were forced, like dogs, to eat dog. Thousands came

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through the camp gates at the end of the war. The first thing that many of them did was hunt down the kapos in hiding and kill them. Among the others, there must be few who did not do something that would make it hard for them to write a book about their lives. Are these survivors somehow less worthy than the Survivor? The most difficult thing for me to accept about Des Pres's book is that the answer to that question is, implicitly, yes.

The reason for this—it is the same thing that accounts for the impression that only those with strength and purity of soul did in fact survive—is the system of moral values, in no way different from those of the Duke of Albany, that permeates the book. For what Des Pres seems to be saying, again and again, is that "survival *depends* on staying human":

> In our group we shared everything; and the moment one of the group ate something without sharing it, we knew it was the beginning of the end for him.
>
> A Treblinka Survivor

> We are all brothers, and we are all suffering the same fate. The same smoke floats over all our heads. Help one another. It is the only way to survive.
>
> An Auschwitz inmate

When Des Pres connects the many instances of help and sharing to biological imperatives, so that the outbursts of goodness are like grass responding to sunlight—"Most survivors simply found themselves helping each other, as if by instinct, as if in answer to a need. Their experience suggests, in fact, that when conditions become extreme *a need to help* arises"—then it is impossible not to think, with Albany, that it is the bad who are destined to perish and that the good shall be rewarded with life.

I wish I could believe this. I want to. I almost can. But there are problems, still. Here is a well-known statement from Eugen Kogen:

> There were two possibilities and within three months it became apparent which one would apply. By that time a man would have gone into an almost irresistable mental decline—if, indeed, he had not already perished in a physical sense; or he would have begun to adapt himself to the concentration camp.

Is it not possible—perhaps even likely—that precisely the most sensitive, the most civilized, those with the closest ties to family and friends, would be least able or willing to "adapt" to Buchenwald? The plain truth is that a good job, a friend ladling soup, and above all luck, luck, and more luck were at least as likely to lead to survival as the possession of the nature of a saint. Giancarlo Giannini, in Wertmuller's excellent *Seven Beauties*, him-

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self a genuine "biological gyroscope," a life-force, has the face of a survivor to me. (Pace Bettelheim who in his *New Yorker* article is toward Wertmuller and the nature of art, radically naive; and towards Des Pres, stubbornly, scandalously unfair.)

Despite these problems, and others, this is an extraordinary book, and it is good that it has been written. It is a corrective to the generally held idea—held even by many of the prisoners themselves—that all concentration camp inmates were childish or passive or brutal to the point of being indistinguishable from their guards and tormentors. In this connection, *The Survivor* is particularly successful at demolishing psychoanalytical interpretations of death-camp behavior. Bettleheim's notions on infantilism and identification with the aggressor, Lifton's on survivor guilt, and those of lesser lights do not hold up well in the face of Des Pres's argument that interpretation does not work when experience has been collapsed to the point where it has only a single meaning, survival; or in a world where everything is forbidden except what must be done on command.

The Survivor is most valuable, though, not as a corrective but as a guide. The prisoners whom Des Pres calls Survivors have been through the worst that our civilization has yet produced and have left a record behind. Others will have need of it, both in its details and for its general sense that, as Des Pres says, "under dehumanizing pressure men and women tend to preserve themselves in ways recognizably human." Ironically enough, for all its disparagement of the tragic vision, and in spite of its ridicule of the fixed idea that pain is connected with "spiritual depth," what is reaffirmed by *The Survivor* is the ancient, Aeschylean formula: *suffering brings knowledge*, and not only knowledge, but something that those of us who may never be forced to such limits need most, a "special grace"—satisfaction with life.

This knowledge—the general tendency of men to remain "steady in their humanness"—Des Pres calls biological wisdom. I think it is a mistake to do so. Not because it is not a fascinating speculation, and not because it is also slightly silly (the need to bear witness becomes a species of alarm call, like a beaver slapping his tail; the "minimal fabric of care," never entirely torn in the camps, ends up being compared to the "communal activity" of spermatozoa), but because it opens up a terrible question that this book, with its limitations, is in no way prepared to answer. What about *them*? Aren't *they* human and so subject to biological wisdom, or dumb chance, too? Life lives upon life, says Des Pres, but in more ways than he (intending a "realm of mutual sacrifice") thinks of. A soldier with a death's head on his cap, hurling an infant against a wall, is no less a part of "the central mystery," and no smaller a marvel, than two prisoners, with their

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last gasp, propping a third on his feet. If we wish to look into *this* biology, we have to leave this book and come full around, back to tragedy, to *Lear* even, where the question, if not answered, is anyway asked: "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?"

In a conversation once, Kafka remarked that the First World War was caused by a "monstrous lack of imagination." The diagnosis holds for the next great war, and for the Holocaust, as well. It is, in a way, what George Steiner meant when he said that, because the archetype of Hell could no longer be believed in as a place under the ground (while retaining its force as an unconscious image), it had to be constructed literally, as Treblinka say, on top of the earth. Those who have thought most carefully about the imagination in relation to the Holocaust (Steiner himself, Adorno, and even Kafka) have recognized that it has been, perhaps irreparably, ruined. "No poetry after Aushwitz," Adorno proclaimed, meaning that the very will of the poet, the shape of his poem, implied a kind of meaning, and gave a degree of pleasure, that tended to mitigate the horror he wished to depict. For Steiner, language in our century has become nearly inoperable; and Kafka's entire work seems to be saying, with a finger to the lips—does it not?—"Silence, please."

Such judgments represent quite an obstacle for a fellow like Lawrence L. Langer who, in his *The Holocaust And The Literary Imagination*, has never a moment's doubt about the "unquenchable impulse of the imagination to piece together the fragments of mystery we call the Holocaust." So, in his opening chapter, he attempts, with great crudeness ("Steiner's genius for expressing significant half-truths," "Adorno never intended his proposition to be taken literally") to dismiss these three figures. To heed the "critic's cry for silence," he writes, "would indeed stifle a multitude of richly imaginative voices." That is, certainly, the crux of the matter. Does what Langer calls "the literary evidence" convince us that there is once again a reason for the tongues in our mouths? Or ought we, must we, continue to be hushed?

This book is in no fashion a survey of the imaginative literature of the Holocaust. There are no critical principles here, no trends, hardly any awareness of the most interesting Holocaust novels, and not even any idea of what the connections might be between the various books that are discussed. What Professor Langer has done is to take a dozen or so novels and a few poems and clump them arbitrarily into sections with titles like, "The Dominion of Death" and "Suffer the Little Children" (which concerns a single novel that happens to have children in it). Then he proceeds to paraphrase these works in a prose style that, all by itself, confirms everything that Steiner has said about language. Abysses and vacuums and voids

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stretch, gape, and yawn on every page. Here is one quite typical fragment (on Schwarz-Bart's Ernie, in the gas chamber):

> . . . the awful void that sucks his vital breath, while space displaces time as the locus of his destiny, negates the very time that sanctioned his life in history and orphans him from a past and future that might justify his merging with a mythical and universalized truth.

It is all—with its constant and inevitable comparisons to Camus and Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky and Lear on the heath, its compulsive use of French phrases (''*L'univers concentrationnaire*'')—like an undergraduate course on the origins of existentialism.

The most serious flaw in *The Holocaust And The Literary Imagination* is that it is organized solely according to Professor Langer's taste, which is lamentable indeed:

> But an essential characteristic . . . of almost all the literature discussed in these pages, is not the transfiguration of empirical reality . . . but its *dis*figuration, the conscious and deliberate alienation of the reader's sensibilities from the world of the usual and familiar, with an accompanying infiltration into the work of the grotesque, the senseless, and the unimaginable. . . .

The grotesque, the senseless, and *the unimaginable* are in truth the criteria for inclusion here. Langer has a horror of ''fidelity to fact,'' of ''naked literal description,'' of realism, of autobiography. He has learned somewhere that these things ''numb the consciousness''; they make it impossible for the author to ''arouse the empathy of his readers.'' What he wants, and insists upon, is a literature able ''to evoke the atmosphere of monstrous fantasy,'' to ''reconstitute reality in shapes and images that reflect a fundamental distortion in human nature.'' The result, as one might guess, is that this book is one long parade of trick rabbis and people hopping out of graves, of ''nightmare castles'' and mad horses and cunning rats, of alter egos named Mon. It all reaches a kind of apotheosis in Langer's breathless and awestruck discussion of Kozinski's *The Painted Bird*, which, we are told, is not only superior to reality, but ''goes even further than Shakespeare did in *King Lear*.'' Here is one such ''universalized metaphor'' from that book, which Langer quotes in full because we ''dare not trespass on the unity of its images.'' I have cut it in half.

> The massive body of the carpenter was only partly visible. His face and half of his arms were lost under the surface of the sea of rats, and wave after wave of rats was scrambling over his belly and legs. . . . The animals now fought for access to the body—panting, twitching their

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> tails, their teeth gleaming under their half-open snouts, their eyes reflecting the daylight as if they were the beads of a rosary.
>
> . . . Suddenly the shifting sea of rats parted and slowly, unhurrying, with the stroke of a swimmer, a bony hand with bony spread-eagled fingers rose, followed by the man's entire arm. . . . In between the ribs, under the armpits, and in the place where the belly was, gaunt rodents fiercely struggled for the remaining scraps of dangling muscle and intestine. Mad with greed, they tore from one another scraps of clothing, skin, and formless chunks of the trunk.

The important question to ask is, does "art such as this" take us closer to what happened to the Jews, or is it, as I believe, a kind of *grand guignol*, a substitute horror show, meant to divert us from what the actual atrocity—most unbearable perhaps in its monotony, its calmness, the way in which it fit unobtrusively into our world—was like? Compare Kozinski's *grotesquerie* with a single line from Mary Berg, who, when writing about what she saw (a rickshaw driver beaten down to the Warsaw snow) does not feel herself "exempted from the claims of literal truth":

> The blood was so horribly red the sight of it completely shattered me.

But there is no Mary Berg, and no other direct testimony in this book—which is fair enough. But there is no Rachmil Briks either, with his simple, funny account of the Lodz Ghetto; nor is John Hersey's *The Wall* even mentioned, undoubtedly because it is distinguished especially by its extraordinary faithfulness to its sources. Perhaps the best book of all, Tadeusz Borowski's collection of stories, *This Way To The Gas, Ladies And Gentlemen*, which is practically a study of what is commonplace about horror, gets all of a page and a half. And most surprisingly, since it is rather up Professor Langer's eerie alley, there isn't a single reference to Michel Tournier's *The Ogre*. I do not mean to suggest there are no fine books here. There is *The Last Of The Just*, after all, and Elie Wiesel's masterpiece, *Night*. (And some of the others that I have not read may not be as bad as they are here made to seem.) But Langer, with his *sensibilité concentrationnaire*, admires what is weakest in these two works—Ernie barking like a dog, for instance, or the way in which *Night* "has transcended history and autobiography"; it is just that "transcendent" element in Wiesel—the fierce, unsublimated rage, and the sweet religiosity—that has made his subsequent works less and less valuable to read.

I have come, finally and reluctantly, to the conclusion that almost any honest eye-witness testimony of the Holocaust is more moving and more successful at creating a sense of what it must have been like in the ghettos and the camps than almost any fictional account of the same events. I am

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not sure why this should be so. It is not true of any other period in history. What Steiner and Adorno and Kafka have had to say surely has something to do with it. And the pull toward the grotesque, which Langer celebrates, but which in fact is a way of not seeing and only pretending to feel, is pretty clearly irresistible. I remember how shocked I was to learn (from Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*) that the Nazis most probably did *not* manufacture soap from human fat. (I have always thought that the rendering of humans for soap and the flaying of them for lampshades revealed perfectly the barbarians' contempt for, and parody of, civilization—with its love of cleanliness and quest for light.) Those brown bars of soap, some of which are actually in museums, have been brought into existence by a universally felt need for horror, to which the writers under examination here, no less than the rest of us, have responded. More time, it seems, will have to pass before we are free enough to imagine the facts. Meanwhile, we do have Des Pres, and in bold type throughout Des Pres's book, as well as in hundreds of books of their own, the plain speech of the witnesses.

LESLIE EPSTEIN

OUR CONTEMPORARY

THE ILLUMINATED BLAKE. Annotated by David V. Erdman. Doubleday. $25.00 ($7.95 in paper).

WILLIAM BLAKE: ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF SIR GEOFFREY KEYNES. Eds. Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips. Oxford. $33.75.

BLAKE'S SUBLIME ALLEGORY. Eds. Stuart Curran and Joseph Wittreich, Jr. Wisconsin. $17.50.

BLAKE'S NIGHT. By David Wagenknecht. Harvard. $12.00.

If the elevation of Donne into the rank of a conspicuously major poet was one of the more notable consequences of the critical revolution which began in earnest in the 1920s, the enormous growth in William Blake's reputation over the past thirty years has surely been accompanied

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by a critical revolution of another sort. And if the convenient simplifications of literary history now suggest that it was the criticism of Eliot which played the most significant role in this revaluation of Donne, the literary historian of another twenty years will probably isolate Northrop Frye as the figure whose criticism was most instrumental in advancing Blake to a position of extraordinary prominence during our own time.

By this I don't at all mean to evoke echoes of what Frye himself has called "the literary chit-chat which makes the reputations of poets boom and crash in an imaginary stock exchange." But I do think it's worth asking whether we've been sufficiently alert to the way certain poets have functioned as vehicles—Donne and the Metaphysicals in the twenties, Wordsworth during the high Victorian period, Spenser and Chaucer in the mid-eighteenth century—for cultural visions which haven't been nearly the disinterested gestures of applied criticism their initial proponents evidently thought they were.

I raise the issue because of Blake's unique status in such a context. Whatever else one can say about him—and lately one has to struggle against the suspicion that everything sensible about him has already been said—Blake remains the Great Outsider of literary studies: the figure whose abilities far surpass those of any other poet denied an audience in his own lifetime. Hence the effort that Frye began so brilliantly in 1947 with his *Fearful Symmetry*—to demonstrate a recognizable literary tradition into which Blake could fit—takes on a peculiar suggestiveness when we consider how much the social thrust of literary studies during the quarter-century that followed the Second War was an enormous cultural analogue to Frye's great effort. Indeed, to quote from the theoretical nakedness of Frye's own *Anatomy* (which appeared exactly a decade after *Fearful Symmetry*): "No discussion of beauty can confine itself to the formal relations of the isolated work of art; it must consider, too, the participation of the work of art in the vision of the goal of social effort, the idea of complete and classless civilization."

I don't think I have to stress how this ideal of "participation" was an important consideration for many of us who chose the teaching of English as a profession in the 1950s and 60s. Our goal was, of course, to introduce an entire generation of college students, through the medium of literary studies, to a conception of culture far different from the prevailing values of the society in which we found ourselves. And however much there may have been of an aggressive elitism lurking in our enterprise, there was also a genuine communal faith that every student who entered our classroom had the potential to be transformed into a new kind of reader, one who

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would prove capable of participating in the responsible discussion of significant works of literature.

That time is past, we know, and all its easy raptures now wear the sad forlornness of deflated illusions. But if there is something more than a passing coincidence to be found between Blake's advance over the past thirty years to a position of central importance in the academic study of literature and the self-conscious mission of a whole postwar generation of teachers of English to enlarge literary studies into as broad a community as it could, then three of the four books under review have a special interest for us.

Let me begin, however, by way of paradox: that the book which has the least resonance within the context I've been trying to establish also happens to be the only one of the four which seems to me really indispensable for the serious study of Blake—David V. Erdman's edition of the illuminations Blake created for his own poetry. For whatever the reservations one may have about the specific details of Erdman's annotations, the appearance of "all" of Blake's illuminated works in a single, moderately priced volume is a major event in Blake scholarship. (I put quotation marks around all because, in spite of the declarations of completeness on the cover and title page, Erdman's edition has necessarily had to reflect individual choices for black and white reproduction from among Blake's own multiple versions of particular works.) With the appearance of *The Illuminated Blake,* in fact, one can hope that the academic tendency to evade the radical uniqueness of Blake's genius will soon go out of fashion.

With *Blake's Night*, on the other hand, David Wagenknecht has produced a kind of milestone in the repeated attempts since *Fearful Symmetry* to assimilate Blake still further into a demonstrable literary "tradition." Taking as his thesis the notion that "the idea of pastoral" is fundamental to an understanding of Blake's poetry, Wagenknecht gives us a sustained interpretation of Blake remarkable chiefly for two reasons: its internal coherence and its emotional poverty. And while at least some readers no doubt will be content with the coherence, I suspect a good many more will find in Wagenknecht's rigidly hermetic conception of "literature" an additional confirmation of the reductiveness of Frye's methods in hands other than his own. Consider, for example, this passage from *Blake's Night:*

> *Europe* describes by means of a sinister parody of Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" the advent of Orc, an event important to the interpretation of "The Tyger."

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Or this:

> If we have to choose between imagery of epithalamion and of elegy . . . we are only dealing with a problem familiar to us from *Thel.* There the agonized fears of a virgin demanded elegiac forms, and in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* a wedding which is prevented by rape and obdurate jealousy refers demonically in a repeated line of its chorus to Spenser's *Epithalamion.*

Yet it may be unfair to the enterprise of which Wagenknecht is an extreme instance not to recognize how the attempts to place Blake firmly within a recognizable tradition can also be read as honorable gestures toward making him more widely accessible. Hence in *Blake's Sublime Allegory,* a collection of fourteen essays by various critics, Stuart Curran, one of the volume's co-editors, grandly assures us on his opening page that "*Jerusalem* is the most lucid of Blake's major prophecies" and that "no sophisticated reader confesses himself lost in its midst." We recognize the tone, of course. It's the same note of positive thinking we used to get when Joyce studies were peaking—that, for example, all we had to do was listen in order to resolve most of the alleged difficulties of *Finnegan's Wake.* Nor should we be surprised that before slipping us an extremely large pill concerning the "seven structures" of *Jerusalem,* Curran first adds to the sugar-coating of his opening by further assuring us that the poem is "relatively simple until the beginning of Plate 18" and that there are comforting analogues to be found between it and *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained.* As for Curran's co-editor, Joseph Wittreich, Jr., his strategy of accessibility is to place Blake within something he calls "the Milton tradition." But to avoid our sensing too radical a distance between the two poets, Wittreich is then constrained to persuade us of a Milton in relation to whom—near the end of his essay—a quotation from Mao Tse-Tung is supposed to fall with the grand appropriateness of an inevitable summation. (It thuds, rather, with the dismal clunk of outdated modishness.)

My point, however, isn't to quibble over the details of earnest academic criticism like Curran's and Wittreich's. Instead, what I want to suggest is how much the effort they both make to demystify Blake seems, in a sense larger than their arguments, to involve an inevitable distortion of his actual impact. And it may be that the very notion of literary "tradition," not to speak of the assimilating nature of getting Blake's poems "ready" for presentation in the classroom, is from the start a fatally compromising approach to so fiercely individual and energetic a vision as his. Indeed, two of the most successful essays in the Curran-Wittreich collection—those by

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Jerome McGann and Karl Kroeber—challenge the critical glibness which has so conveniently transformed Blake into one more subject for academic study, rubbing shoulders as it were with far more conventionally educated types like Milton and Joyce.

Perhaps it will be appropriate, then, to discuss the final book under review—Morton Paley's and Michael Phillips's collection of seventeen essays in honor of Geoffrey Keynes—by giving attention to only a single essay, F.R. Leavis's attempt to come to grips with the "challenge" of Blake (the word is his). Presented first as a lecture at Bristol University in late 1971, Leavis's essay is a striking reminder of how far we have come (and not always to our advantage) from the critical revolution to which the name of Eliot is most firmly attached. For Eliot's own view of Blake figures prominently in Leavis's essay.

Not, I should add quickly, that Leavis is in agreement with the obviously snobbish side of Eliot's disapproval. On the contrary, there remains something of that characteristic touch of Leavis at his most committed in the insistence that "Blake, who died in 1827, . . . is a major living force today, and that his attitude to life and civilization has a validity, a salutary and inspiring rightness, that Eliot's hasn't." But there is an implicit endorsement of Eliot's overall judgment in Leavis's assertion that any potential student of Blake "should be told unequivocally that none of the elaborated prophetic works is a successful work of art." Nevertheless, the most interesting aspect of Leavis's essay is his departure from Eliot to insist on "Blake's profound indebtedness to Shakespeare." It's a curious kind of insistence, and the accompanying denial of any real influence on Blake from Milton's verse surely reflects as much Leavis's long-standing distaste for Milton as it does any close reading of the Prophetic Books. But with Shakespeare's name brought into prominence, one can't help regretting that Leavis hadn't been willing to display a little more rigor in the comparison, particularly with respect to what may be the most suggestive contrast of all: Shakespeare, with a vital organic relationship to a national audience, and Blake, the unparalleled isolate of unparalleled creative gifts. From such a contrast it just may be possible to conceive of a more complex kind of "tradition" than the narrowly literary one to which Blake has been consigned during the past quarter-century.

WILLIAM WALLING

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WRITERS' CHOICE

GEORGE LEVINE: About three years ago, during a particularly rough time in my life, I became a birder. I've worried since then about my instinct to turn all experience into prose, an instinct that in this case would violate the special silence of those genuinely amateur hours out in the woods and by the shore. But when I think about the books that I have cared most about over the past three years, the first two that come to my mind are field guides: Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds* (Houghton Mifflin) and *Birds of North America,* by Chandler Robbins, Bertel Bruun, and Herbert Zim (Golden Press). As I think back now, I realize that I have spent more time with these books in hand, more time studying and flipping through them, than I have with any others.

They are really quite wonderful. Peterson created his field guide, organized the material in it, and illustrated it, with the intention of giving as much information as quickly as possible to people actually out in the field. (I have thought, at times, that he had me in mind as I helplessly tried to stare down some bird reluctant to name himself.) Although the illustrations are usually attractive, they function entirely as symbols to be read through: they exist not to call attention to themselves but to the real and various and eccentric birds flapping away out there in the wild. They help make the world, not the books, beautiful. The prose, though it has its graces (the chimney swift is "a cigar with wings": the chestnut-sided warbler calls either, "I wish to see Miss Beecher," or "please, please, please to meetcha") is clipped and functional. In an intellectual milieu where the self-referential nature of language is becoming a commonplace, such unself-conscious usefulness almost produces a *frisson.*

Birds of North America learned from Peterson (even bird books have their intellectual history) and one-upped him. It is a miracle of condensation, the necessary prose condensed and juxtaposed immediately against the illustration, silhouettes of birds in flight set off against those of other species. It is all there, or seems to be. Perhaps here the revolution of information theory is most clearly manifest. Where Peterson was reduced to using language to describe the range of each bird (e.g., the clumsy and difficult, "Breeds on plains from cent. Saskatchewan and s. Manitoba to North Dakota and nw Minnesota, etc." while the bird is winging out of view), this newer guide provides a coded map for each bird, indicating where it is

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likely to be at every season, in every month. It's breathtaking, and you can find it all out before the bird takes off, in a split second.

It's tempting to build these texts into courses in information theory, or the conventions of representation in art and poetry, or perception, or symbolism. But I'm leaving my desk, cluttered with *Art and Illusion, S/Z, Structuralist Poetics, Beginnings,* and I'm going silently to catch some of the late fall migration, with large pockets full of Peterson and Zim.

LEO BERSANI: For a clear idea of the extraordinary (and, in America, neglected) achievements of recent French psychoanalytic thought, read Jean Laplanche's *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, translated by Jeffrey Mehlman, and recently published by the Johns Hopkins University press. Laplanche's work is much more accessible than Jacques Lacan's; is it too much to hope that his brilliant work will help to reconcile American intellectuals to rigorous speculative thought, and to make them realize that "theory" is not necessarily a negative word?

NEIL SCHMITZ: I would like to recommend the sparely written, coldly twisted tales in Ian McEwan's *First Love, Last Rites* (Knopf, 1975). McEwan is a young English writer (this is his first book) whose sense of the strange often resembles Alfred Hitchcock's. There it is, the strange, in a hard light. The stories in *First Love, Last Rites* deal primarily with the loss of English innocence, which, like English beauty, is a thing apart. His book ought not to slip past the knowledge of intelligent readers. And then there is the poetry of Carl Dennis. Can one credibly recommend the poetry of a friend? If I hated Carl Dennis, I would still admire the poems in *Climbing Down* (George Braziller, 1976). They are lucid, tender, and Dennis's line makes a kind of exquisite music from plain speech. Much the same can be said for another poet of Dennis's generation, Robert Pinsky. The rhythm sustained in "Poem About People," the first poem in *Sadness and Happiness* (Princeton, 1975), is an example of virtuosity. The book's long concluding poem, "Essay on Psychiatrists," is ambitious, tautly ironic, carefully worked, and yet finally it is only poignant. It addresses in part the vexed spirit of Yvor Winters, whom we all know lived intensely with his madness, was grimly married to it, and brought it, leashed, to the lectern. Pinsky relishes that vision. His own quick, alert line keeps punching into Wintersian sonorities.

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LETTERS

CORRECTION

PR:

In naming writers who contributed pieces to *Partisan Review* in opposition to McCarthy, William Phillips failed to include me in the list. I'm sure this was an oversight; I belong there.

Diana Trilling
New York, New York

EDITORS' NOTE:

It was indeed an oversight, which I regret. I had forgotten that Diana Trilling's "Autumn Journal" (Vol. XX, no. 1, 1953), as well as an even earlier piece, "A Memorandum on the Hiss Case" (Vol. XVII, no. 5, 1950), included a number of passages critical of McCarthy.

W.P.

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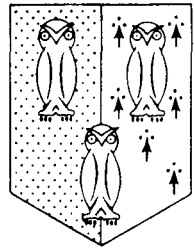

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Calvin S. Brown

"A fascinating compendium of the folklore, folk idiom, and folkways of what has become the most famous county in the United States of America, this book will be a delight to all of Faulkner's readers. For non-Southern readers who want to get all that Faulkner is saying, it will prove a necessity."—Cleanth Brooks
$12.50

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Kimberly W. Benston
Foreword by Larry Neal

This study of Baraka's literary career moves from analyses of his poetry, prose, and ideological treatises to a culminating discussion of his drama. It traces the roots of his art and relates his formal innovations to the evolving political, moral, and artistic beliefs that led him to change his name from LeRoi Jones to Imamu Amiri Baraka. $12.50

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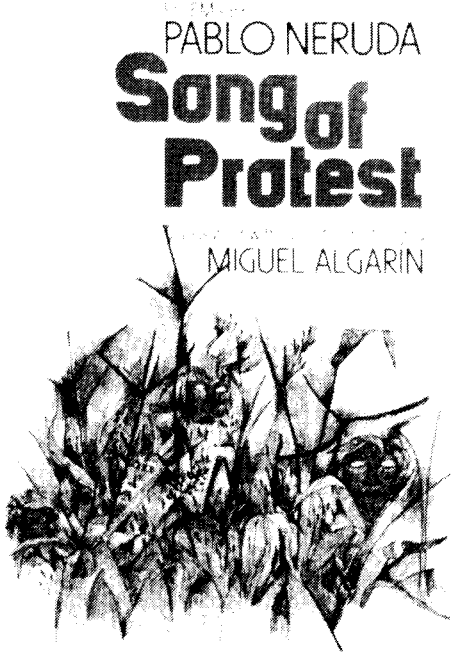

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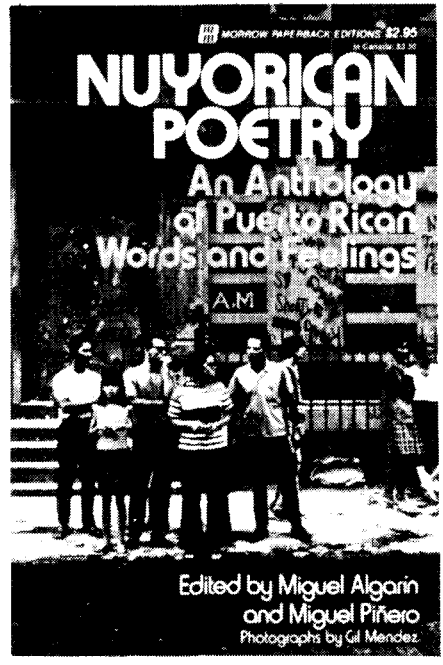
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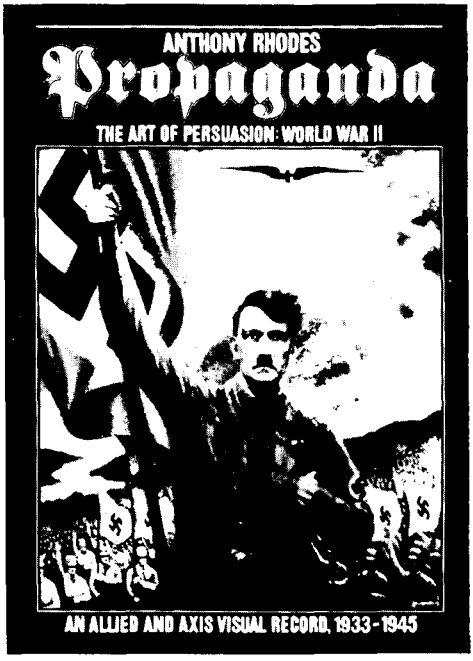

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